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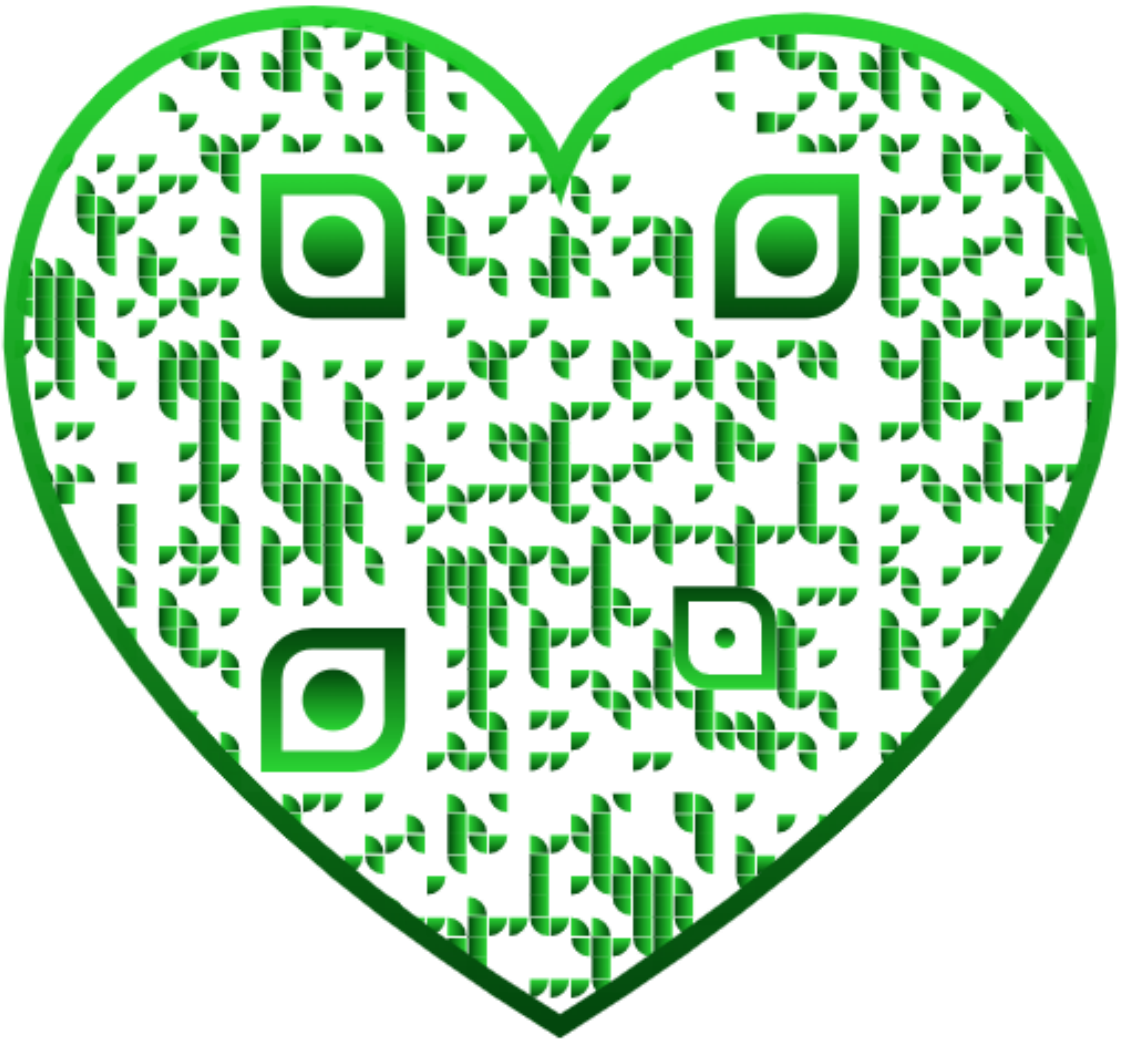
VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR
RICK WAKEMAN
BIG BIG TRAIN
VENNART
TESSERACT
EBB

"There were riots going on!"

JETHRO TULL

How they broke America

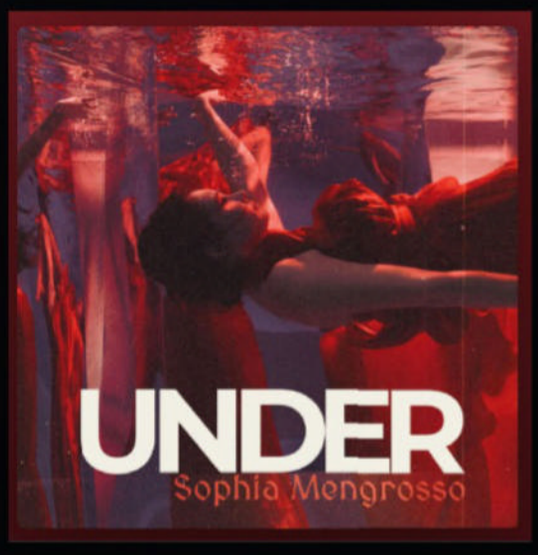
FUTURE
PROG 149



SOPHIA MENGROSSO

Sophia Mengrosso's haunting, ethereal soundscapes underscore the strength and subtlety of her voice, distinguishing her as a contemporary musical force. Her fusion of classical elegance with the raw energy of rock has engendered a sound that is entirely her own. Her compelling new single 'Under' showcases her talent and versatility, with immersive production quality coupled with candid lyrics and captivating vocal delivery.

Sophia's upcoming album 'Unforgiven' will further explore the emotional depths she has so skillfully crafted. Her live shows and festival appearances are always highly anticipated, offering audiences a chance to fully engage with her unique musical narrative.



sophia_mengrosso

UNDER out now

Listen On Spotify

ISSUE 149 12.04.24

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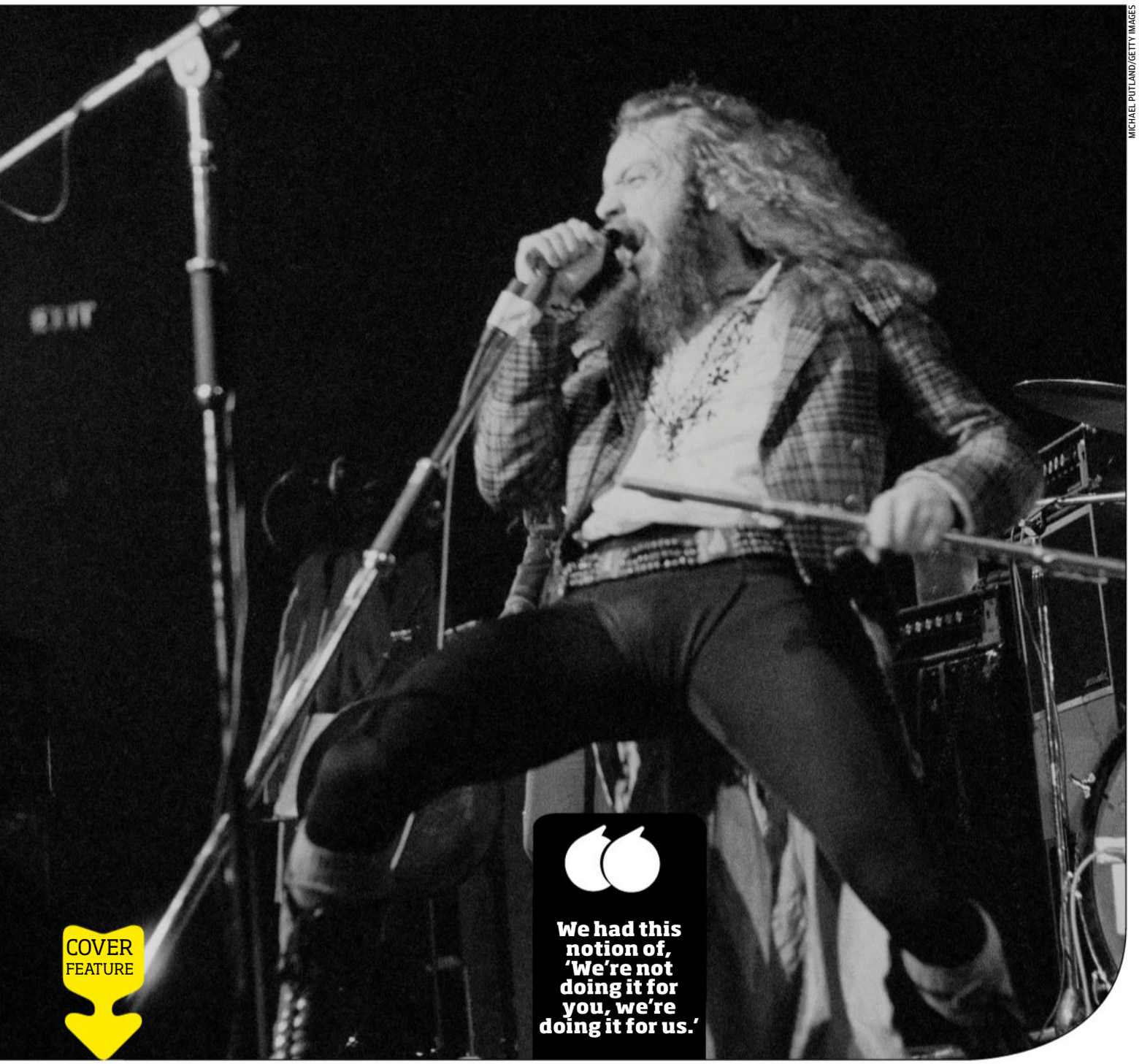

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

COVER FEATURE

We had this notion of, 'We're not doing it for you, we're doing it for us.'

Jethro Tull p28

How Jethro Tull took on the USA… and won!

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SCAN

RADAR FESTIVAL

FRIDAY 26 JULY 2024

THE MIDNIGHT

PLINI VOLA TO BE ANNOUNCED
CASKETS THROWN EARTHSIDE
VOWER THE INTERSPHERE UNPEOPLE
CESTRA GIANT WALKER

SATURDAY 27 JULY 2024

TESSERACT

DIRTY LOOPS TO BE ANNOUNCED
HEART OF A COWARD CONJURER
THE FALL OF TROY ITHACA GRAPHIC NATURE
HAIL THE SUN SEETHING AKIRA
KYROS TRIBE OF GHOSTS

SUNDAY 28 JULY 2024

LEPROUS

REAL-TIME SONG REQUEST SET

TO BE ANNOUNCED SUNGAZER
HUMANITY'S LAST BREATH
OXYMORRONS BLOOD COMMAND SIAMESE
ASHEN THE OMNIFIC FUTURE STATIC
ADHARMA IKONIK

O2 VICTORIA WAREHOUSE MANCHESTER
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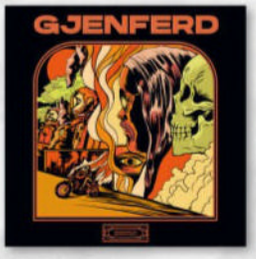
NEW RELEASES FROM APOLLON RECORDS

LAUGHING STOCK
Shelter
feat. Tim Bowness out 31/5

ALWANZATAR
Engsyre
Krizla from Tusmørke & Chronicles of Father Robin
sixht solaalbum out 26/4



GJENFERD
Gjenferd
Debut album from retro rockers from Bergen feat. members from Kryptograf and Metusalem
Out 10/5

SUNFACE
Cloud Castles
Psych/ stoner from Oslo
Out 19/4

K'MONO
Mind out of Mind
Second album from this great Minneapolis, US prog trio - finally on vinyl & CD OUT now

LUCIFER WAS
Ein Fix Ferdig Mann
Legendary Norwegian 70s rockers Lucifer Was returns with "Ein Fix Ferdig Mann" OUT 15/3

THE DREDGE
Torches
Debut album from post-rockers from Bergen
OUT 5/4

YOBREPUS
A Rhizome Revolution Part 1
Third album and part 1 of a new album series from the Oslo indie prog band Yobrepus OUT 22/3

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Apollon Records

PROG PRESENTS...

Discovering

dunk !RECORDS

Dunk!records is a Belgian label with a vast repertoire of cinematic instrumental music, spanning from post-rock to classical, jazz and heavier sounds like metal and drone, with a strong focus on vinyl.

The label was founded in 2011 with the release of the now-iconic *If Wolves* by Kokomo, and it's now the cult home of classic European post-rock with more than 200 albums released to date. Highlights from their past and present are collected in this exclusive sampler.

In addition to the label, the Dunk! brand also includes a music festival (Dunk!festival), recording studios and rehearsal spaces (Dunk!studios), as well as a vinyl pressing plant (Dunk!pressing) that allows for limited-edition coloured and bundle sets. This is what makes them truly unique and they press their own records by hand in a boundless variety of colours and effects.

How to download your free digital sampler from Dunk!records

Scan here to download or follow the instructions on the right

1. Visit www.bit.ly/dunk_sampler
2. Click 'Buy Digital Album' and enter '0' as the price.
3. Enter your email address and country, then download the album to your computer
4. Enjoy your new music!

Discover more music from Dunk!records by visiting the official label website dunkrecords.com

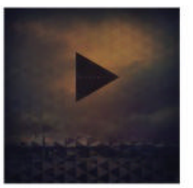
What's on your free Dunk!records digital album

Download the 20-track sampler from www.bit.ly/dunk_sampler

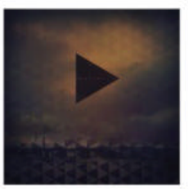
1 Coldbones
The Flooding Of The World
Taken from *The Cataclysm*

2 Kozmotron
Roadkill On The Milky Way
Taken from *Beyond Event Horizon*

3 Kozmotron
O'Sidarta
Taken from *Beyond Event Horizon*

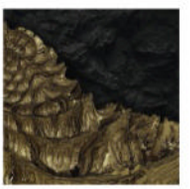


4 Lost In Kiev
A Mere Shift Of Origin
Taken from *Motions*

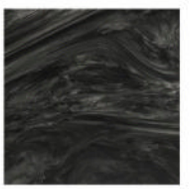


5 Lost In Kiev
The Day I Ruined My Life
Taken from *Motions*

6 Le Temps Du Loup
Eulerian
Taken from *Cardinal*



7 Le Temps Du Loup
Sic Semper Tyrannis
Taken from *Enthraller*

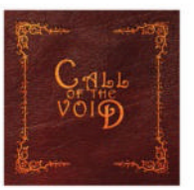


8 Le Temps Du Loup
Leteo
Taken from *Leteo*

9 Indignu
Devolucao Da Essencia Do Ser
Taken from *Adeus*

10 Indignu
Urge Decifrar No Ceo
Taken from *Adeus*

11 Georgeson
The Ballad Of The Ninety-Nines
Taken from *The Solitude Of An Empty Sky*



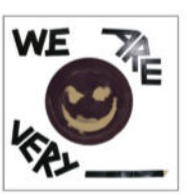
12 Celestial Wolves
Bangui
Taken from *Call Of The Void*

13 Pray For Sound
I Have Seen Hell And It's White
Taken from *Everything Is Beautiful*

14 Go March
Stampede
Taken from *III*

15 Turpentine Valley
Vergeten
Taken from *Etch*

16 Turpentine Valley
Tremor
Taken from *Alder*



17 Huracan
Dobermann Multiverse
Taken from *We Are Very Happy*

18 Divided
The Vicious Loop
Taken from *Light Will Shine*

19 Divided
Days Undone (So Long)
Taken from *Light Will Shine*

20 [BOLT]
18
Taken from *(04)*

Ed's Letter

Spotify

Stream the Prog 149 playlist at www.spoti.fi/3xgA24s

Hello and welcome to the latest issue of *Prog*. Issue 149 – one away from the big 150 – yet no poorer for it!

Did you know that by 1974 Jethro Tull were selling out four consecutive nights at the at the 20,000-capacity LA Forum and two at New York's Madison Square Garden? And a year later, five nights at the LA Forum? Little wonder *Melody Maker* dubbed them "the world's biggest band" at the time! It's fair to say that prog was very big news Stateside in the 70s, and it was Tull who led the way for the likes of Yes and ELP, and later Pink Floyd and Genesis. With stats like that, they were even primed to give Led Zeppelin a bit of a run for their money!

Dave Everley talks to Ian Anderson, Martin Barre, US agents and Yes guitarist Steve Howe (about their time supporting the band) to uncover the secrets of how Jethro Tull broke the USA. It's a fascinating read and you'll find it on p28.

Elsewhere, Gentle Giant discuss how they dealt with the onset of punk rock in the story of *The Missing Piece*, former VdGG saxophonist David Jackson lifts the lid on life within the band and beyond, and Devin Townsend recalls the tumult surrounding the making of 1998's *Infinity* album.

Also in your jam-packed issue of *Prog:* Mike Vennart, Elbow, North Sea Echoes, Jane Getter, Randy McStine, Midas Fall, The Chronicles Of Father Robin, and Zombi update us on their new releases, and EBB, the winners of the New Band category in the Readers' Poll, have their say, too.

It only seems like yesterday I was wishing you all a Happy New Year, and yet by the time the next issue of *Prog* lands, it will be May 17! As Fairport Convention so eloquently put it, who knows where time goes?

I hope you'll all be back with us then. Stay safe, and prog on...

Jerry Ewing – Editor

NEXT ISSUE MAY 17 ON SALE

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TRANSATLANTIC

LIVE AT MORSEFEST 2022: THE ABSOLUTE WHIRLWIND

In Stores 26th April 2024

'Live at Morsefest 2022: The Absolute Whirlwind' is a comprehensive document of the bands performances over two days. **Neal Morse**, **Mike Portnoy**, **Pete Trewavas** & **Roine Stolt**, alongside **Ted Leonard** and a string & choir section perform the entirety of *'The Whirlwind'* and *'The Absolute Universe'* albums, as well as tracks from across their catalogue.

Available as a Limited Deluxe 5CD+2Blu-ray hardcover artbook including 36-page booklet filled with photos.

SIX BY SIX

BEYOND SHADOWLAND

In Stores 26th April 2024

The second album from **SiX By SiX**, the progressive rock power-trio featuring **Robert Berry** (3, The Greg Kihn Band), **Ian Crichton** (Saga) & **Nigel Glockler** (Saxon).
A dynamic statement featuring Robert Berry's soaring vocals & production, Ian Crichton's searing guitar lines & Nigel Glockler's powerhouse drumming.

Available as Ltd CD Digipak, Gatefold 2LP (including 4 bonus tracks on Side D) & as Digital Album.

OU 蘇

II: FRAILTY

In Stores 26th April 2024

The mesmerizing sophomore album from the Chinese progressive metal band, produced and mixed by **Devin Townsend**!

Available as Ltd CD, Limited 180-g white/black marbled LP & as Digital Album.

WHEEL

CHARISMATIC LEADERS

In Stores 3rd May 2024

The stunning third album from Finland-based progressive metallers **Wheel**. Available as Limited CD (incl. Rumination EP tracks as bonus), Gatefold 180g Black LP & as Digital Album.

See the band live in the UK this Autumn:
19th Nov – Rebellion, **Manchester** · 20th Nov – Cathouse, **Glasgow**
21st Nov – Rescue Rooms, **Nottingham** · 22nd Nov – 1865, **Southampton**
23rd Nov – Underworld · **London** · 24th Nov – Thekla, **Bristol**

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JUST A DREAM?

When I saw the latest edition of *Prog* [148] during my weekly Tesco shop, I couldn't believe my eyes! Was that really Tangerine Dream on the cover? Not only that, but a story about the making of *Phaedra* and some Edgar Froese postcards to boot. It landed in my shopping trolley quicker than you can say "krautrock"!

Chris Wheatley's exposé on *Phaedra* cast a new light on one of my favourite albums and it was fascinating to read how much of its "otherworldly" sound was down to the Moog itself. As Steven Wilson says, it's hard to believe that an album so strange and so truly progressive was so successful.

Those postcards have now been framed and Peter Baumann's Virgin albums set has been pre-ordered — I had no idea they were being reissued so that was another very pleasant surprise as my original vinyl copies have certainly seen better days!

Thanks for another excellent read.

Sam Gibson, via email

Tangerine Dream on the cover of *Prog* 148.

DREAM TEAM

Great article on Tangerine Dream in *Prog* 148, *Phaedra* certainly deserves the attention. [Margarete Kreuzer's 2017 documentary on Edgar Froese] *Revolution Of Sound* on Sky Arts made a good companion to it.

How about having a Buyers' Guide in *Prog*? TD would be good for starters, and the excellent Mostly Autumn.

Brian Curtis, via email

FROM GENESIS, A REVELATION!

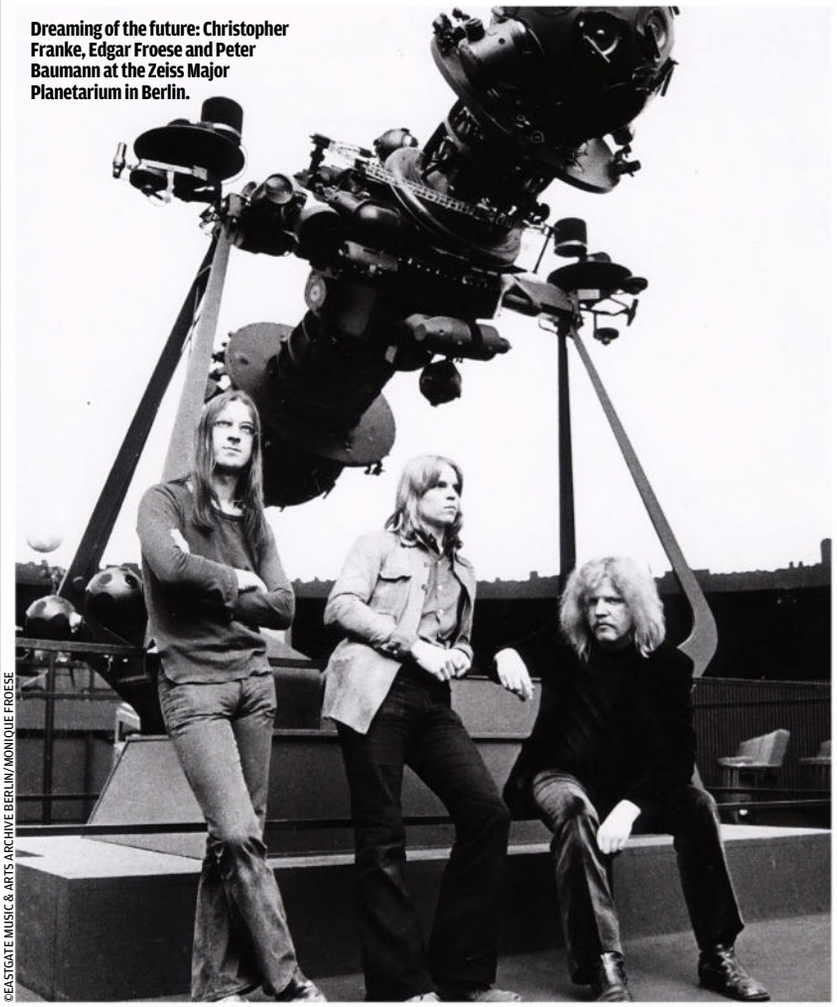
Thank you for *Prog* 146 and the story on the beginning of the neo-prog movement. I have waited many years for a neo-prog cover story. What a great surprise to see this issue on the shelf at my local bookstore.

My prog journey began in 1981 with the Genesis album *Abacab*. That album completely changed my musical life. Over the next few years I explored the band's back catalogue as well as some of the bandmembers' solo albums. I absolutely fell in love with Genesis and much of the solo work of Phil Collins, Mike Rutherford, Tony Banks and Steve Hackett. Much of their music was my introduction to the wonder world of progressive rock.

Jump ahead to 1987. One day while reading album reviews in a British heavy metal magazine I came across a review of the latest album by Marillion. I was aware of the band, but totally unaware of their sound. The reviewer angrily wrote that the band's newest album, *Clutching At Straws*, proved they sounded just like Genesis. The reviewer wrote that as a negative. For me it was a positive. I rushed out and bought the cassette without hearing a note. *Clutching At Straws* profoundly affected me and my prog rock preferences. That album truly opened my eyes to other progressive rock bands beyond Genesis. My deep dive into prog, especially neo-prog, began then and it has continued ever since.

Troy Tennard, via email

Our neo-prog feature from *Prog* 146.



Dreaming of the future: Christopher Franke, Edgar Froese and Peter Baumann at the Zeiss Major Planetarium in Berlin.

©EASTGATE MUSIC & ARTS ARCHIVE BERLIN/MONIQUE FROESE

A DAY AT THE PALLAS

Just downloaded the free Pallas album [*Prog* 148's digital sampler]. Fantastic. It's great to hear recent material next to the earlier pieces.

I remember seeing them at Newcastle Dingwalls in 1983 and they blew me away. There was only a handful of audience, but they played as if their lives depended on it and as if it was a packed arena. They did a superb rendition of Floyd's *Echoes* alongside (among others) *The Ripper*, *Queen Of The Deep* and, of course, *Arrive Alive*. Such was the lack of crowd that we were able to meet them afterwards. A great bunch of friendly fellas! Thanks to *Prog* for sharing this to all *Prog* readers!

Tim Brennan, via Facebook

We're so glad you enjoyed last issue's free download, Tim. Now turn to p7 for our Dunk!records sampler. — Dep. Ed.

MYSTERIES OF THE DECK

It was interesting to read [in *Prog* 147] that Steve Hackett's *Voyage Of The Acolyte* was given its name by Tony Stratton Smith. Robert John Godfrey of

LETTER

I'm writing these notes from Heathrow; in a few hours, I'll be returning to my hometown, Pereira, Colombia.

I planned this trip six months ago to see The Pineapple Thief live for the first time at the O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire in London. And how joyful I was! I spoke with a couple from Newcastle for about an hour before the show. I forgot their names, but I will never forget our very interesting conversation. Being able to see The Pineapple Thief live [was a] dream fulfilled!

And before the trip, I thought, "What do I do for the rest of the nights?" It wasn't difficult to choose: the London Symphony Orchestra at the Barbican, the BBC Concert Orchestra at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, and, on the last night, the great tribute to Genesis, The Musical Box at the G Live in Guildford. I was blown away! I never got to see Genesis live; they never played anywhere near where I live, and before Steve Hackett left the band, I was a teenager.

And to top it off I bought *Prog* 148. Happiness is complete: on page 40, there's an article about The Pineapple Thief, nothing better to end the trip.

Thank you *Prog* for allowing me to stay updated on the music I admire so much despite the enormous distance.

Jorge González, via email

This issue's star letter wins a goodie bag from burningshed.com *Contents may vary*

The Enid, who had previously recorded a solo album for Charisma, was always slightly peeved that he had told Stratton Smith of his plans to record a tarot-based concept album using that very title.

Robert was convinced The Enid's thunder had been stolen and ended up having to use *In The Region Of Summer Stars* as a title for his band's first release instead. Both tarot-themed albums were recorded around the same time in 1975, but The Enid's effort didn't appear until 1976, by which time they had secured a label deal with Buk.

However, the waters are muddied somewhat by a revelation in V*an der Graaf Generator, The Book*, written by Jim Christopulos and Phil Smart. In that book, Hugh Banton of VDGG reveals that back in 1972 Stratton Smith made a suggestion that he too should make a tarot album called *Voyage Of The Acolyte* for Charisma! Although Hugh did some work on the project it was never completed.

As Strat died in 1987 perhaps we'll never know why he was so keen on Charisma releasing a tarot concept album with that particular title and what influence, if any came, from Robert Godfrey. If it's any consolation to Robert I think *In The Region Of The Summer Stars* is a much nicer name!

Charles Williams, via email

BIG BIG QUEUES!

I'm back from another excellent Cruise To The Edge, aka the prog cruise. What glorious weather and wondrous sounds! Steve Hackett, Flying Colors, Adrian Belew, Lifesigns — all quality shows — and Marillion with Nick Beggs, a fitting stand-in for Pete Trewavas — get well soon, Pete! I also really enjoyed watching Dream Theater's Jordan Rudess play on the pool deck with a talented young singer [That Joe Payne] who I'd not heard of before. Their rendition of Dream Theater's *The Spirit Carries On* and a Genesis medley were particular highlights and I look forward to discovering more of his work.

As always, there was an excellent spread of classic and newer acts, but there was one small disappointment: I missed Big Big Train's performance at the Stardust Theater because of the ridiculously long queue. For the bigger acts we could use our laminates to guarantee a seat, but I guess the organisers didn't realise just how popular Big Big Train were going to be. Hopefully next time they'll be one of the bands we can use our laminate passes for.

Anyway, here's to the next one!

Will Burke, via email

Thanks for your email, Will. It sounds like you had a wonderful time on the cruise. We sent our roving reporter Grace Hayhurst to cover this year's event and you'll find her write-up and photos on our website (www.bit.ly/prog_cruise_24). — Dep. Ed.

Joe Payne joins Jordan Rudess on the pool deck at this year's Cruise To The Edge.

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INTRO

IF IT'S OUT THERE, IT'S IN HERE

TILLISON GOES SOLO ON NEW TANGENT LP

While the rest of the band are out on the road with other projects, Andy Tillison takes the reigns and records latest album on his own.

UK prog mainstays The Tangent have announced their 13th studio album, *To Follow Polaris* — and singer-keyboard player Andy Tillison reveals that it's a solo record in the truest sense.

"It's what Elon Musk would refer to as 'absolutist'," says Tillison of his decision to handle all the instruments on the record himself.

"Every Tangent album has had this sliding doors moment, where I could go off and finish it myself or I could bring in the other guys. This time, I wondered if I could take it the whole way. Plus it just happened that some of the others weren't available this time."

As with every Tangent album, *To Follow Polaris* — out via InsideOutMusic on May 10 — was recorded in Tillison's home studio.

"I gave myself the chance to play things that I never would have before," he says. "I've been playing the drums for years, but I've never got a chance to play them on a Tangent album. And I got my first bass at Christmas 2022 — I'd never needed one before because I'm in a band with Jonas Reingold, so it would be ridiculous. But I think the bass on this record sounds pretty damn good. Though rest assured, the bassist fell out with the drummer!"

"I gave myself the chance to play things that I never would have before."

Tillison describes *To Follow Polaris* as ultimately an "optimistic" record. Indeed, opening track *The North Sky* ties in lyrically with the album's title.

"For me, it's all about truth," he says. "Everybody's arguing about everything: did we land on the Moon? Is the Earth flat? Did he say that? Did she do this? It's crazy. I wanted to find one thing that nobody can argue about, because it's always there in the north, all the other stars go round it. Even the flat-Earth people can't deny Polaris."

The album's five tracks range from the blackly humorous *The Fine Line* ("There's a Venn Diagram with one circle that says 'The Apocalypse' and the other that says 'Having To Go To Work' and the area in the middle is where we've ended up") to *A Like In The Darkness*, which finds Tillison questioning the value and worth of art in a world where success is measured in online clicks.

"Time after time, I've been sat here late at night, writing the songs and putting them together, with a light burning that nobody else can see," he says. "There always comes this point where you think, what am I doing this for? People are fighting wars, and all I have to offer is this pathetic little tune. How many lives is that going to save? How beneficial is that going to be?' All artists ask themselves that question."

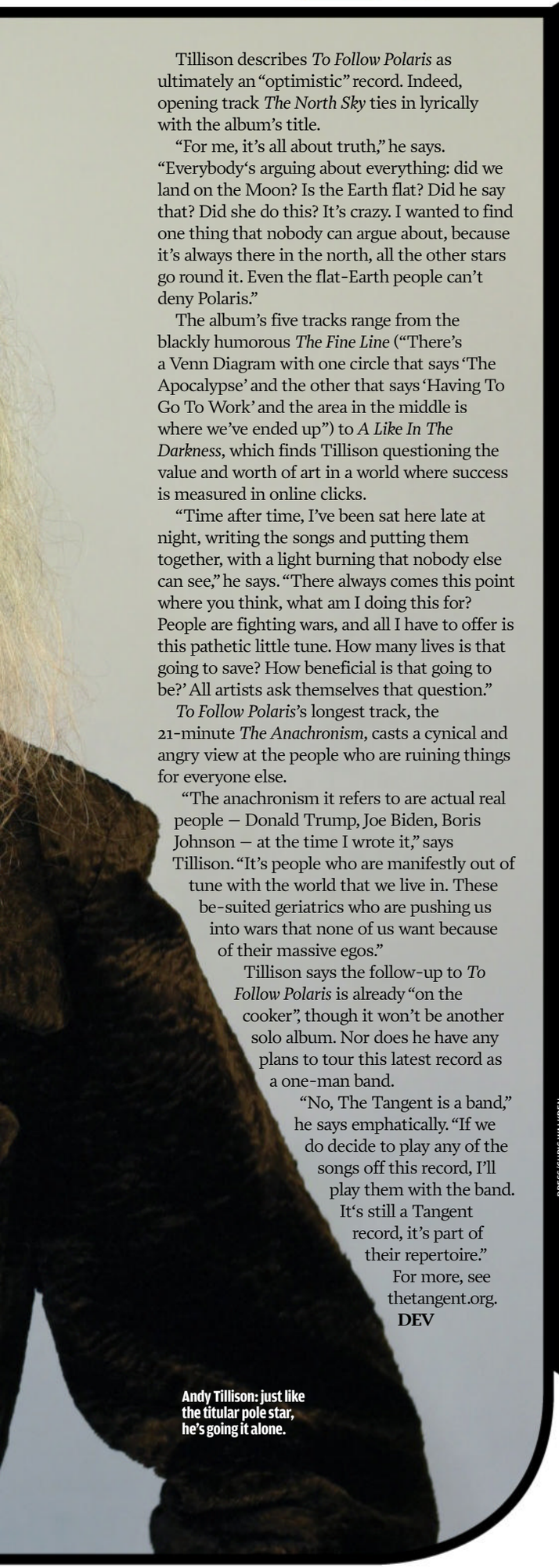
To Follow Polaris's longest track, the 21-minute *The Anachronism*, casts a cynical and angry view at the people who are ruining things for everyone else.

"The anachronism it refers to are actual real people — Donald Trump, Joe Biden, Boris Johnson — at the time I wrote it," says Tillison. "It's people who are manifestly out of tune with the world that we live in. These be-suited geriatrics who are pushing us into wars that none of us want because of their massive egos."

Tillison says the follow-up to *To Follow Polaris* is already "on the cooker", though it won't be another solo album. Nor does he have any plans to tour this latest record as a one-man band.

"No, The Tangent is a band," he says emphatically. "If we do decide to play any of the songs off this record, I'll play them with the band. It's still a Tangent record, it's part of their repertoire."

For more, see thetangent.org. **DEV**



Andy Tillison: just like the titular pole star, he's going it alone.

PRESS/CHRIS WALKDEN

This month, Intro was compiled by

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JOHN CARPENTER GOES INTO THE DARK

The classic imagery of film noir inspires new album *Lost Themes IV: Noir.*

Dark stars: John Carpenter with Cody Carpenter and Daniel Davies.

PRESS/SOPHIE GRANSARD

"The imagery is bold," ponders Daniel Davies as he recalls how a chance Christmas gift of a book of stills from noir films from the 1940s from John Carpenter's wife, Sandy, to her husband, came to inspire *Lost Themes IV: Noir*, which is released via Sacred Bones on May 3.

Davies, who has worked with Carpenter and his son Cody across the *Lost Themes* series, says, "When I'm hanging out with John, we're always talking about movies and what we think about them – the imagery and how music works in movies. As I was looking through the book, it had such strong images and contrasts and I started asking John which his favourite film noir films were. And then I thought, 'Why don't we base an album on his favourite noir films?'"

With titles such as *My Name Is Death*, *Kiss The Blood Off My Fingers* and *He Walks By Night*, the album evokes noir films of the 1940s and 1950s throughout.

Explaining the compositional process, Davies says, "In some cases, the title led the songs while some titles fit the songs that were written. It worked both ways. In the case of *My Name Is Death*, John had written that down and I was looking at it and came up with the bass line and then we started working on it."

Ironically, the composition of real soundtracks is preventing the trio from playing live.

"We're working on some film scores right now so concerts depend on the schedule," laughs Davies. "We'll have to see."

See www.johncarpentermusic.bandcamp.com. **JM**

PORTALS FESTIVAL 2024 LINE-UP IS ANNOUNCED

This Will Destroy You and If These Trees Could Talk top bill.

Portals Festival, the UK's leading post-rock, math rock and new progressive festival held in London in May, has unveiled its full bill, with US post-rockers This Will Destroy You announced as Saturday headliners. They join fellow countrymen If These Trees Could Talk, who headline the Sunday night of the two-day event.

Portals Festival takes place at EartH in Hackney on the weekend of May 25-26 and will feature 35 bands over three stages.

"We're stunned to have secured This Will Destroy You as headliners for Portals Festival 2024," says Festival Director Asher Kenton. "They're a band who have shaped both the post-rock genre and our personal music tastes. So many bands on the line-up would cite them as major influences, so to be able to bring together legends of the genre with incredible new up-and-coming artists is an absolute joy."

See www.portalsrock.com/festival for full line-up and ticket details. **JE**

If These Trees Could Talk: not the whispering grass.

PRESS

KAVUS TORABI OPENS THIRD EYE

Psychedelic musician goes foraging for the magic ingredient on his new album.

Navigating consciousness: Kavus Torabi.

PRESS

Singer-guitarist Kavus Torabi has claimed that a "heroic dose" of magic mushrooms not only helped him finish his new solo album, *The Banishing*, which is released on May 3 via Believers Roast, but also that the experience was "atheism-dissolving".

Best known for fronting Gong in the wake of Daevid Allen's passing and as member of The Utopia Strong with snooker champion Steve Davis and multi-instrumentalist Michael J York, the Knifeworld leader recorded *The Banishing* during a period that saw him descend "into psychosis". Such was the experience that he left both his family and London.

"I had a pretty rotten old time of it," Torabi tells *Prog*. "Recording the album was completely cathartic and it helped me understand things more. It was a form of therapy and it's where I come to terms with my struggles in the material world. It's a bit of a cliché to make a Covid album as so many people did, but it had disastrous consequences for me: I'm no longer in London and I'm no longer with family. It wasn't on anybody's lottery ticket that they wanted a middle-aged man's psychosis album, but they got it anyway. I feel like I've come out of the other end."

With the album largely completed at his new base near Glastonbury, he felt that the last track recorded for the album, *Mountain Of Glass*, was too self-pitying.

"I knew that I had to change the lyrics," he says. "I couldn't really find anything, so as a final cleanse I thought I'd take this heroic dose of liberty cap mushrooms. I fasted all day and went for a walk to Glastonbury Tor and back and was thinking about it all day. I made all these notes as I was going under and it was this atheism-dissolving experience. I've had this a few times in the past, but nothing as profound as this. It wasn't even a belief but an utter conviction that this body is merely atrophying housing for something eternal, greater and singular."

Looking ahead, Torabi confirms that The Utopia Strong are already working on the follow-up to 2022's *International Treasure*, with a tentative release date pencilled in for early 2025.

"We're very excited about what will be our third studio album as we're getting deeper and deeper into whatever it is that we're doing," says Torabi. "We definitely feel that we're not repeating ourselves." **JM**

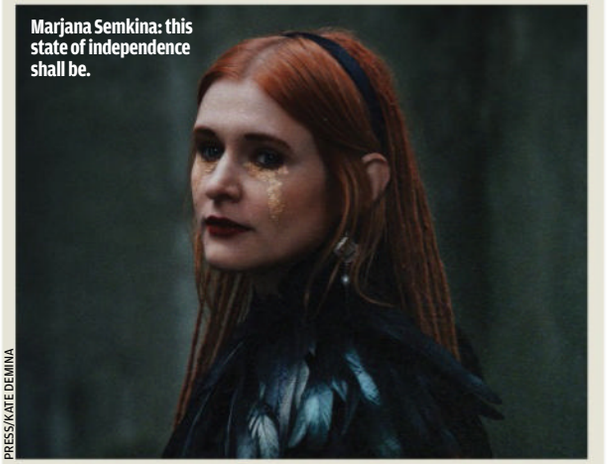
"The body is merely atrophying housing for something eternal."

See www.kavustorabi.bandcamp.com for more information.

INTRO extras

PINK FLOYD TO ISSUE NEW MIX OF ANIMALS

Pink Floyd have announced the release of a Dolby Atmos mix of their 1977 album, *Animals*, through Warner Music on May 17. It will be the first time the album has been available in Dolby Atmos. *Animals 2018 Remix – Dolby Atmos*, which will be released on Blu-ray, as well as digitally, features the 2018 remix by the band's long-time producer James Guthrie, high-resolution stereo and 5.1 mixes alongside the 1977 original stereo mix. See www.pinkfloyd.com.



Marjana Semkina: this state of independence shall be.

PRESS/KATE DEMINA

MARJANA SEMKINA KICKSTARTS ALBUM

Iamthemorning vocalist takes the indie plunge for forthcoming solo record, *Sirin*.

"It's a bit bleak, but this is where the best art comes from: struggles," says Marjana Semkina about her upcoming solo album *Sirin*. The title references a half-woman, half-bird creature in Slavic mythology: a harbinger of death and misfortune.

"It's related to Greek sirens, it's a little different in the way that all Slavic things are just darker," says Semkina.

The vocalist's solo debut *Sleepwalking* was released on Kscope in 2020, but now she's gone independent, raising funds for *Sirin* through a Kickstarter campaign.

"It's a very big endeavour for me; this entire album is very ambitious," she says, "and what I'm doing with the merch is very difficult to carry alone. Financially it's impossible."

The campaign will be used for the manufacture of CDs, hoodies, T-shirts, and an exclusive crystal-clear vinyl laced with gold leaf.

"The album isn't just the music, it's every detail that comes with it; it's a unified art form," says Semkina.

The vocalist describes *Sirin* as a challenging record to make, saying, "It was emotionally very taxing because it touches on a lot of subjects that are difficult to write about."

The first single, *We Are The Ocean*, addresses Semkina's friends in Russia who had the courage to protest against the war in Ukraine, despite risking arrest: "It's a message of unity, if we come together and scream loudly enough, we will be heard," she says. "I want them to know they're not alone."

See www.kickstarter.com/projects/marjanasemkina/sirin. **DW**

RENDEZVOUS POINT LOOK INWARD ON THIRD ALBUM

Norwegians ponder the nature of artistic achievement.

Norwegian prog metallers Rendezvous Point are set to return after a five-year hiatus with the release of their third album *Dream Chase*, which is released via Long Branch on June 21. The eco-conscious new single, *Don't Look Up*, is streaming now across numerous digital platforms.

Diving deep into themes of personal growth and societal disillusionment, the album also examines artistic exploration with a focus on perfection.

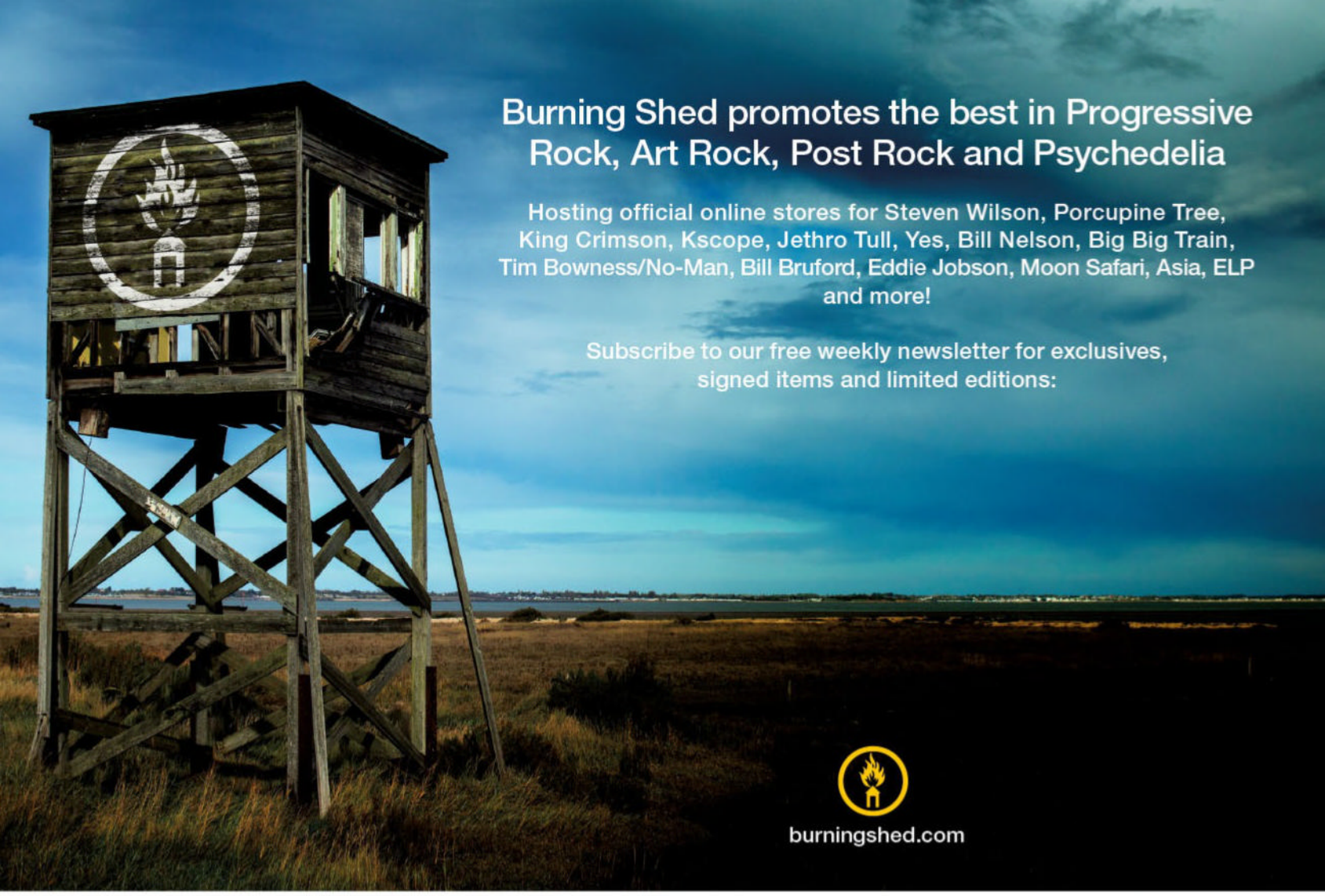
Say the band, "Artists often strive a whole lifetime searching for something abstract, a feeling of perfection in what you do or create. Since it's an abstract and subjective thing, the artist's search for perfection often results in a lifetime of always wanting more, better, bigger and deeper. This leads to chasing something unclear and untouchable, like a dream. It seems real and reachable, but never is."

The album, however, will be entirely tangible.

For more details, head over to www.rendezvouspoint.bandcamp.com. **JM**

Rendezvous Point: what's it all about?

PRESS/JONATHAN VIVIAAS_KISE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PALLBEARER CARRY NEW APPROACH

Arkansas prog-doom quartet are inspired by Peter Gabriel and Talk Talk on new collection.

Pallbearer: turning things on their head.

PRESS/DAN ALMASY

Pallbearer's fifth album finds the band at their most "subdued and uncomfortable" according the bassist-vocalist Joe Rowland. *Mind Burns Alive* is released via Nuclear Blast Records on May 17, with the Arkansas prog-doom quartet focusing on emotional rather than guitar-driven heaviness.

"It's Pallbearer stripped back and on the verge of a mental breakdown," says Rowland. "In the past, we've leaned into bombast to deliver emotion. We've inverted that methodology to let the quiet of the record be the main form of delivery."

He continues, "The album revolves around six vignettes of people in various stages of mental distress and we wanted to capture that sense of unease. We were inspired by the mentality that Peter Gabriel had with some of his earlier solo records where the percussive elements had fewer cymbals in the mix. It allowed us to give more sonic space to the vocals and guitars. The space in general pulled from [Talk Talk albums] *Spirit Of Eden* and *Laughing Stock*, as well as *Hex* by Bark Psychosis."

Drum tracking was originally slated for April 2020, but was scuppered due to global events. The second attempt saw tracking happen without guitarist-vocalist and creative force Brett Campbell, who was sidelined through illness. The band worried that the record was cursed but, thankfully, the third time proved a charm. Looking back, Rowland is thankful for the record's protracted timeline.

"I don't think this record would be anywhere close to the record that [would have been] had we ended up doing that first session," he says. "It required the developmental time that it ended up having. It felt like a providential happening."

One major change made during that interim was the inclusion of saxophonist Norman Williamson. He provides a modal jazz solo on *Endless Place*, one of two tracks on the album that break the 10-minute barrier.

"We tracked the solo and immediately I started manipulating his performance in the studio to make it as psychedelic and madness-inducing as I could," the bassist remembers.

Rowland confirms that North American, European, and UK tour dates are being planned and will be the band's most extensive run of shows since the release of 2017's *Heartless*. **POW**

> **"It's Pallbearer stripped back and on the verge of a mental breakdown."**

See www.pallbearerdoom.com for more information.

INTRO extras

ALBUM NINE DUE FOR THE DECEMBERISTS

The Decemberists are set to return after a six-year hiatus with the release of *As It Ever Was, So It Will Be Again* on June 14 via YABB Records (Thirty Tigers). The double album has been co-produced by Tucker Martine and band singer Colin Meloy. Guests include REM's Mike Mills and The Shins' James Mercer. The release has been preceded by the 19-minute prog epic *Joan In The Garden*, which is streaming now. See decemberists.com for more.

Alcest: dawn chorus greets album seven.

PRESS/ANDY JULIA

ALCEST HUNT FOR THE SWEET SPOT

Atmospheric French duo go in search of balance on their upcoming album.

"It's always a goal for me to make something interesting from the beginning to the end, to make the listener travel, like a journey," says Neige, frontman of Alcest. France's blackgaze pioneers will release their seventh studio album *Les Chants De L'Aurore* on June 21 via Nuclear Blast.

"All the songs are completely different," says Neige. "There is a track with just piano and vocals, the last track is very cinematic, the second-to-last is more like black metal, and we have this almost emo, very short post-rock track." The dreamy shoegaze quality that Alcest is renowned for surfaces in the song *Komorebi*, named after the Japanese word meaning light falling through leaves. Despite the ephemeral quality behind that idea, Alcest haven't cast off their formative metal influences.

"I always try to find a nice balance between every stylistic side of the band," says Neige, "not too black metal, not too shoegaze, I try to find this sweet spot."

To promote the release, Alcest will undertake a huge 32-date European tour from October to December. As an introvert, Neige finds being onstage a little uncomfortable, but the response from the fans makes it more than worthwhile.

"It's a win-win exchange," he says. "We give something, but they give us back so much. All these beautiful looks on their faces, all the tears, it's really intense. It's a sign that it was a good show if we even manage to make the tough metal dudes cry."

For more, visit www.alcest.bandcamp.com. **DW**

EYE LOOKS AWAY FROM MWWB WITH DEBUT ALBUM

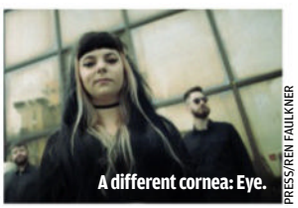
Singer Jessica Ball moves into dreamy but still heavy realms.

Eye – the new project from Mammoth Weed Wizard Bastard (MWWB) singer-songwriter and musician Jessica Ball – have announced the release of their debut album *Dark Light* on April 23 via New Heavy Sounds.

The band was put together when Ball relocated from Wrexham to Cardiff to be with her new partner, Welsh musician Gid Goundrey, who has previously played with Super Furry Animals' offshoot Gulp as well as former Boo Radleys frontman Martin Carr among others. Augmented by keyboardist Johnny TK, *Dark Light* was written in the wake of the pandemic.

"The album ultimately is quite introspective, yet lyrically loose enough to be open to interpretation," says Ball. "I've always been a fan of songs that seem to perfectly slot into the situation I'm experiencing and not too specific to one person's experience. I think that comes across in this album."

See www.eye-uk.bandcamp.com for more information. **JM**



A different cornea: Eye.

PRESS/REN FAULKNER

FAD GADGETS

Rhodri Marsden on three of the latest must-have gizmos currently putting the prog in progress.

JBL SPINNER BT

I'm slightly suspicious of newly launched turntables with Bluetooth functionality, and assume that they'll be cheap and nasty. This, however, combines a modern look with decent functionality and sound, thanks to a belt-driven platter and an Audio Technica cartridge. Some may balk at their beloved "warm" analogue vinyl sounds being converted to digital, but it's doubtful they'd tell the difference in a blind test. JBL has thought of them regardless, with traditional phono or line outs for connecting to a preamp, amp or active speakers.

www.jbl.com

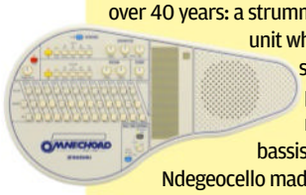
EMINENT MODEL TWENTY TWO

"Rock music is mostly about moving big black boxes from one side of town to the other in the back of your car" is a truism attributed to Cleveland's finest avant-garage ensemble, Pere Ubu. This state of affairs, however, may be about to change. The Eminent Twenty Two is a guitar cab that looks more like a tea tray – just five inches thick and weighing in at just over 7kg. Despite that, it provides 350W of power and is, by its very nature, a super-green product: fewer materials needed to make it, less energy required to transport it to a rehearsal room to a gig and back again.

www.etprospeakers.com

SUZUKI OM-108

Last spring we heralded the arrival of the AKT-0.1, a MIDI controller styled as an Omnichord, and pondered whether it might kickstart a revival. Well, here come the original manufacturers of the Omnichord with the first new version for over 40 years: a strummable, proddable unit which has a built-in speaker for those pick-up-and-play moments. Ace bassist Meshell Ndegeocello made an Omnichord-inspired album last year saying, "It gave me a way to work out ideas without having to look at a screen." Now, that's an idea I can get behind.



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MY PROG HERO

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PRESS/EDVARD HANSSON & BRENDAN BALDWIN

You'll be the one: guitarist Wolfgang Van Halen (inset) can't get enough of Meshuggah.

PRESS/TRAVIS SHINN

WOLFGANG VAN HALEN

Though they initially shook him up, the Mammoth WVH guitarist now gets into the groove with the polyrhythmic **Meshuggah**.

"The first time I heard Meshuggah, I wasn't into it; it scared me. They were one of the first bands I heard that had screaming, but I liked it because they were singing it, too. I was always in that frame of mind that if it doesn't have singing then I don't like it and then I heard Meshuggah. And I was like, 'You know what? This is fine!' I remember it was the riff for *Stengah* – this was the heaviest, most exciting, groovy thing that I could possibly imagine.

I've seen them twice. The very first time was at the Wiltern in LA on the *Koloss* tour and it was amazing. Late '22, we took a break from recording *Mammoth II* because Meshuggah were in town at the Palladium. We luckily got this cool balcony spot and I got to bring my Uncle Patrick, who was not a fan at all. Every time I played him Meshuggah, he'd be like, 'I don't get it.' When I brought him to the show, he understood. After seeing it, he was like, 'Holy shit! I get it now!'

My dad approved of them. I remember his joke when I showed him the video to *Bleed*. He said, 'The drummer better be paid the most! He's working way harder than anybody else in the band!' A lot of fans love the early albums like *Chaosphere*, which is where they really came into their own but I prefer *Nothing*. It's all about falling into this awesome groove with the crazy polyrhythms on top of the 4/4 beats. I could groove to it all day.

If you're not familiar with Meshuggah, then check out *Bleed* and if that impresses you then you should go to *Chaosphere* and then take *Nothing*. Just go for it! I think hits like *New Millennium Cyanide Christ* on *Chaosphere* are great but you can't go wrong with *Stengah* or especially *Rational Gaze* on *Nothing*. Seeing *Rational Gaze* live, it's the magic tempo where the crowd jumps the whole time. It's one of my favourite concert moments of '22 when I saw them at the Palladium. I'm that dickhead who films videos at concerts because the whole room was shaking and jumping at once to the tempo. It was magical and otherworldly." **JM**

"The whole room was jumping at once to the tempo. It was magical."

Mammoth II is out now via BMG. The band are currently on tour with Slash. See www.mammothwvh.com for more information and the full dates.

PROG IN BRIEF

PRESS/TINA KORHONEN

Steve Hackett's (right) 1986 album *Feedback 86* is to be released on vinyl for the first time on May 24. Also reissued on the same day is 1984's *Til We Have Faces*. Both are out on 180g vinyl with gatefold sleeves via InsideOutMusic. See www.hackettsongs.com.

Icelandic post-rockers **Sólstafir** have signed with Century Media. They've also announced a 24-date European tour for November and December. UK dates include Brighton, Manchester, Dublin, Glasgow and London. Details at www.solstafir.is.

Swedish prog metallers **Evergrey** will release *Theories Of Emptiness* – their 14th studio album – via Napalm on June 7. The album has been produced by frontman Tom S Englund and Jonas Ekdahl. For more info see www.evergrey.net.

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THE BEGGS SISTERS

Elegant harmonies, heartfelt lyrics, folky melodies and a must-have bassist.

FORMING A BAND with your dad may not be on everyone's to-do list, but for siblings Willow and Lula Beggs, it seemed like a natural next step. Nick Beggs fostered his daughters' love of music from a young age, inspired by his own musical success with Kajagoogoo in the 1980s. The Beggs Sisters 'emoto-folk' trio blossomed out of their mutual passion for music and a desire to create and share experiential stories.

"I was going through a tough time and my dad suggested we all do something together to help me tap into my creativity again," Lula Beggs begins. "The idea really grew from there."

Having wowed audiences with their close harmonies and heartfelt lyrics, The Beggs Sisters, who some readers will have seen supporting Marillion at their Roundhouse show last December, now hope to reach new listeners with their debut EP, *Sleep With The Ghost*. Packed with folk-based melodies, intense harmonies, and profound themes, it tells a powerful story.

"We write about mental health, the environment, our anxieties, and heartbreak," says Lula. "Many of us live in a world consumed by momentary things and more people are craving authenticity because of that."

"It's important to have a platform where you can discuss what you're passionate about," Willow Beggs adds. "We talk about mental health, even pausing between songs at gigs to do so."

While the EP carries no overarching theme, the expressive lyrics and existential harmonies convey an important message. For Nick, this stems from his daughters' ability to speak openly about their lives and experiences.

"There's nothing more powerful than art to enable us as a race to understand our place in the universe," he says. "It's hard to believe that in some parts of the world, creativity is quelled. It's essential my daughters say what they feel about the world in which they live."

Creating and performing songs with such close emotional ties can be empowering but also draining. Willow and Lula agree that the subject matter of a song can impact the enjoyment of a performance.

"I go through waves of loving different songs at different times," Lula admits. "Some songs I end up hating because I play them too much or the emotion becomes too real."

Sleep With The Ghost took around a year and a half to compile. The greatest challenge was not making the music but narrowing down the final selection.

"We were going to do a double album but decided our first release should be concise," says Willow. "We chose the songs we enjoy playing live."

For Nick, the joy of playing music with his daughters overrides any perceived challenges.

"Performing with the girls is pretty uplifting. It feels like an apotheosis. The whole experience, the dialogue between us, carries people along when they come to see us."

With the EP now available and some exciting gigs planned for the year ahead, the future looks bright and Nick acknowledges Marillion's support in helping The Beggs Sisters on their journey:

"They're very special people and we're very grateful to them." **FT**

"There's nothing more powerful than art to understand our place in the universe."

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Willow Beggs *(ukulele, guitar, voice)*, **Lula Beggs** *(ukulele, guitar, voice)*, **Nick Beggs** *(double bass)*

SOUNDS LIKE

Acoustic folk-pop with proggy leanings, thought-provoking lyrics and lush, emotive harmonies

CURRENT RELEASE

Sleep With The Ghost is out now via Bandcamp

WEBSITE

www.facebook.com/thebeggssisters

It's a family affair: L-R: Willow, Lula and Nick Beggs.

PRESS/SEB WAWRZNIAK

PORTISHEAD

DUMMY

(Go! Beat, 1994)

The old proverb "mighty oaks from little acorns grow" was never truer than when Beth Gibbons and Geoff Barrow met on an Enterprise Allowance scheme in Bristol in 1991. Tapes were exchanged in their tea break and a new band soon emerged. Portishead would inhabit their own demimonde on debut album *Dummy*, which celebrates 30 years this year. With multi-instrumentalist Adrian Utley soon on board, they changed the way records were made going forwards, inspiring the warm crackle of the needle drop on a thousand intelligent hip-hop tracks, and opening the floodgates to a deluge of ersatz downtempo imitators (we'll not blame them for the latter).

The coffee-table copyists couldn't replicate the melancholia or come close to the attention to detail though. There's an idiosyncratic methodology at work on *Dummy* that borders on the virtuosic, something you might associate with King Crimson, even if the results are very different, sonically. There are samples, of course, taking in the progressive jazz of Wayne Shorter's Weather Report on *Stranger*, the moody blues of Isaac Hayes' *Ike's Rap II* on *Glory Box*, or the cimbalom-enhanced *The Danube Incident* by the legendary jazz and movie theme composer Lalo Schifrin on *Sour Times*.

What makes *Dummy* unique, though, is the fastidious way in which the band recorded their live instruments, pressing the results up on vinyl and then sampling themselves, giving everything a measured sense of uncertainty. There's an odd marriage of warm analogue instruments with a patina of the uncanny, where scratching meets theremin, and cut-ups mingle with cold war twangy guitars. That may sound cluttered but on *Dummy* there's never a note or texture out of place. The album is imbued with an essential quality that underpins prog, too: unashamed ambition.

Even before they'd made a full record, Portishead made their own mini spy movie *To Kill A Dead Man*, a chiaroscuro film noir full of assassins, chessboards and John Barry-esque musical moods to ramp up the intrigue. A grainy frame featuring a bloodied Beth Gibbons tied to a chair was lifted from the film and mounted on the cover of the album to add to the mystery. With a small budget and only themselves and a few accomplices to play the parts, they'd already begun to world-build, and that world is a sphere where the gravity is heavier and where the air tickles your skin; where the hues are bluer and the atmosphere more gloomy. This was a world that was wholly believable yet uniquely theirs.

Perhaps what elevates *Dummy* though is the astonishing voice of Beth Gibbons, which brings a folk horror spookiness to proceedings, an instrument that's as gothic as it's bluesy. When she sings, '*This is the beginning of forever and ever...*' on *Glory Box*, you feel yourself disappearing into a vortex with the promise of another world on the other side. And what could be more proggy than that?

JEREMY ALLEN

ALL AROUND THE WORLD

Our far-out trip to far-flung prog

Northodoxian: exploring the belief in the divine.

PRESS

NORTHODOXIAN

Faith and devotion are examined through atheist eyes by Estonian quartet who blend sacred music with prog rock.

While not all religious experiences lead to conversion, there are those powerful enough to merit artistic exploration. Ergo Northodoxian is a project that's been put together by Estonian promoter, producer and multi-instrumentalist Lauri Laubre after witnessing devotion so intense from followers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that it left him profoundly shaken.

Visiting southern Ukraine in 2007, Laubre — then, as now, a confirmed atheist — was introduced to Archimandrite Mikail Pyanov, the rector of the Holy Trinity Dukonsky Monastery. He showed him the restricted and cloistered sections of the monastery, and then introduced Laubre to the pilgrims who'd travelled from across Ukraine.

"I'd never seen anything like it before, but about 100 people were laying on the ground and praying," says Laubre. "They'd been there for two weeks with their families with no lights, no heat, nothing. It was like stepping into a movie scene. It somehow echoed back to me. It was a very special atmosphere."

"I'd never seen anything like it. It was like stepping into a movie."

What intrigued Laubre most was the faith and devotion expressed by the pilgrims. "I just wanted to somehow show this power to non-believers," he says. "All of a sudden, I saw the way to do it." His answer was to present an observation on the power of faith and worship by integrating liturgies, Orthodox choral music and hymns with prog rock. The end result is Northodoxian's eponymous debut album, a powerful blend of the sacred with the profane.

Helping him bring this vision to life are Raul Vaigla ("a legendary Estonian bass player"), drummer Andrus Lillepea and, coincidentally, Ukrainian guitarist Gennadiy Grimov. "He came to visit me in my home studio and we became great friends," recalls Laubre. "He's an unbelievable talent."

More practical and complex concerns surround Northodoxian's plans to perform the album.

"We're trying now to figure out not just a live band show, but maybe more like a visual musical experience." You can't help but have faith in that. **JM**

See www.northodoxian.com.

PROG IN BRIEF

Prog veterans **Nektar** (right) pay tribute to their late drummer **Ron Howden** with *Journey To The Other Side - Live At The Dunellen Theatre June 10, 2023*, which is released via Deko Entertainment on May 10. See www.nektarsmusic.com.

German proggers **RPWL** have just released *True Live Crime* on double vinyl, double CD and Blu-ray via Gentle Art Of Music. It was recorded live at The Poppodium Boerderij in Zoetermeer, the Netherlands last year. See www.rpwl.net for more information.

PRESS

PROG PRESENTS NEW MUSIC
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LARGE PLANTS
all this month on
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PRESS/LARGE PLANTS

Folk fan Jack Sharp in the midst of some Large Plants.

LARGE PLANTS

Wolf People alumnus pens psychedelic love letters to British folk and psych.

WHEN WOLF PEOPLE crossed *Prog*'s threshold in 2010, it was like discovering a long-lost Vertigo classic. Adding supernatural folk stories in for good measure, theirs was a style and sound that inspired authors such as Benjamin Myers and Tom Cox. With them on hiatus since 2020, it's reasonable to say they've been missed. Luckily the band members have all been busy musically, and this is how Large Plants have emerged — the brainchild of WP vocalist and guitarist Jack Sharp.

"I had a dream that my late grandmother gave me an album and told me, 'You'll love this,'" Sharp tells us over Zoom. "It was the most amazing music I'd ever heard and the artist was called Large Plants."

A music performance lecturer by day at Milton Keynes College, by night Sharp was involuntarily a lone creator, but, brimming with musical ideas, he found a barn in a friend's back garden in Bedford and spent his summer practising and recording tracks.

"I set up some drums, amps and a tape machine and set myself a challenge: 'Can I write and record an album in seven days?' The answer was 'No,'" he laughs. "But I did 15 demos and thought, 'I might as well finish this off.' Which is what I did over the next few weeks."

Meanwhile, experimental record label Ghost Box had been in touch on social media.

"I hadn't logged into Wolf People's socials for a year," Sharp says, "and there was this message from Jim [Jupp] asking if we'd like to do something. He was keen to diversify and had just released Paul Weller's EP [*In Another Room*], so I sent him my tracks."

These would make up a debut LP, 2022's *The Carrier*, and latest release *The Thorn*. Listeners will hear similarities to Wolf People, and the 60s/early 70s psychedelic rock element is strong on both records. *The Thorn* differs by leaning into Sharp's affinity with British folk music, approached from odd artistic angles.

"I grew up listening to Captain Beefheart and The Incredible String Band. I was interested in being surprised," he nods. "Prog, for me, is where you're doing something which takes twists and turns and defies your expectations of what music should be."

Folk music is also in Sharp's background: his mother would sing him folk-song lullabies as a child. Later, as a hip-hop fan in his teens and 20s, he sampled one of her Pentangle records, which opened him up to the delights of the 60s revival. In April 2020 he released his debut solo album, *Good Times Older*, a beautiful, straight-up folk record.

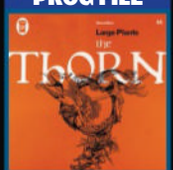
"Rock and prog are really exciting, but one voice can be so direct," he says. "Hearing Anne Briggs was a lightning-bolt moment; my melodies and phrasing come from English and Irish folk music."

It sounds like we'll be hearing much more of it.

"Music is therapeutic for me," Sharp affirms. "Since Wolf People began their hiatus I found myself just wanting to create as much of it as possible." **JK**

"Music is therapeutic for me. I want to create as much of it as possible."

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Jack Sharp *(guitar, vocals)*, **Paul Milne** *(bass, vocals)*, **Joe Wooley** *(guitar)*, **Itamar Rubinger** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

70s Vertigo prog with a twist of acid folk weirdness

CURRENT RELEASE

The Thorn is out now via Ghost Box

WEBSITE

facebook.com/largeplantsband

Official Progressive Albums Chart

The prog top 30 albums

March 2024

Compiled by Official Charts Company

1 **STEVE HACKETT** The Circus And The Nightwhale *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
2 **BIG BIG TRAIN** The Likes Of Us *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
3 **PETER GABRIEL** i/o *(REAL WORLD)*
4 **RICK WAKEMAN** Live At The London Palladium 2023 *(ESOTERIC)*
5 **THE PINEAPPLE THIEF** It Leads To This *(KSCOPE)*
6 **IHSAHN** Ihsahn *(CANDLELIGHT)*
7 **TAME IMPALA** Lonerism *(FICTION)*
8 **STEVEN WILSON** The Harmony Codex *(VIRGIN/SW RECORDS)*
9 **WITHIN TEMPTATION** Bleed Out *(FORCE MUSIC)*
10 **MIKE OLDFIELD** Tubular Bells – 50th Anniversary Edition *(UMC)*
11 **JEAN-MICHEL JARRE** Versailles 400 – Live *(SONY)*
12 **TESSERACT** War Of Being *(KSCOPE)*
13 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** This New Noise *(TEST CARD)*
14 **ROGER WATERS** The Dark Side Of The Moon Redux *(COOKING VINYL)*
15 **PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING** Inform Educate Entertain *(TEST CARD)*
16 **SIGUR RÓS** Átta *(BMG)*
17 **ARISTOCRATS** Duck *(BOING MUSIC)*
18 **THE FLAMING LIPS** Yoshimi Battles The Pink Robots *(WARNER MUSIC)*
19 **JETHRO TULL** RökFlöte *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
20 **PORCUPINE TREE** Deadwing *(TRANSMISSION)*
21 **KING GIZZARD & LIZARD WIZARD** PetroDragonic Apocalypse *(KGLW)*
22 **OPETH** Damnation *(MUSIC FOR NATIONS)*
23 **CALIGULA'S HORSE** Charcoal Grace *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
24 **YES** Mirror To The Sky *(INSIDEOUTMUSIC)*
25 **PSYCHEDELIC PORN CRUMPETS** Fronzoli *(WHAT REALITY?)*
26 **POLYPHIA** Live At The Factory In Deep Ellum *(RISE)*
27 **TANGERINE DREAM** Phaedra *(VIRGIN)*
28 **RUSH** Signals *(WARNER MUSIC)*
29 **SLIFT** Ilion *(SUB POP)*
30 **GOAT** Medicine *(ROCKET RECORDINGS)*

FIND OUT MORE AT **WWW.OFFICIALCHARTS.COM**

WIN! PETER GABRIEL I/O BOX SET

Last year, Peter Gabriel broke his two-decade hiatus with the ambitious studio album, *i/o*. Released to coincide with the lunar cycles, its tracks were issued as Bright- and Dark-Side mixes, each enhancing a different quality to the music. Both sets of mixes are being released on this very limited collectors' edition, out via Real World Records on April 26, and we have a copy to give away to one lucky reader.

Packaged in a foil-blocked, clamshell box with obi-band, the *i/o* collection contains the contrasting sides of the album spread across four vinyl records, as well as two CDs and a Blu-ray. The latter also includes additional In-Side Dolby Atmos and stereo mixes to maximise your listening experience. Packaged with the set are a casebound book with expanded liner notes and a poster. It's a real treat for any Peter Gabriel fan!

To be in with a chance of winning this special prize, visit www.bit.ly/PROG_149 and answer the following question:

Which of the following artists doesn't appear on *i/o*?

a) Brian Eno

b) Jennie Abrahamson

c) Robert Fripp

For more information see petergabriel.com

TERMS AND CONDITIONS: This competition will be open from April 12-May 17, 2024. By entering you agree to our competition rules (available at www.futureplc.com/competition-rules). Entries limited to one per household regardless of the form of entry. Use of automated devices as methods of submission are not valid forms of entry. The winner will be selected at random from all correct entries received by the closing date. No employees of Future Publishing or any of its group companies or the employees of any entity which has been involved with the administration of this competition or any member of their households may enter this competition. All prize details are correct at time of press, Prog magazine reserves the right to offer an alternative, if necessary. The winner will be notified by Future by email after the closing date. If a winner has not responded after 28 days, an alternative winner will be drawn.

Now our turn...

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Jerry Ewing

MARJANA SEMKINA

Sirin
SELF-RELEASE

The Art Guy
Russell Fairbrother

LAUGHING STOCK

Shelter
APOLLON

The Deputy Ed
Natasha Scharf

MIDAS FALL

Cold Waves Divide Us
MONOTREME

The Musician
Michael J York

CAROLINA EYCK

Thetis 2086
CAROLINAEYCK.BANDCAMP.COM

The Writer
Cedric Hendrix

KING CRIMSON

Live In Chicago, Il (November 29, 1995)
DMG

The Reader
Shaun Geragthy

SHADOWS ON MERCURY

Worlds Apart
SHADOWSONMERCURY.BANDCAMP.COM

THE BARDIC DEPTHS

Literary lyrics and thoughtful music that wouldn't exist without Big Big Train.

THE STORY OF The Bardic Depths is entwined with that of Big Big Train. Helmed by Lanzarote-based Dave Bandana, the quintet was formed among the posts of BBT's Facebook group. They've assembled three albums so far, with studio assistance from Robin Armstrong of Cosmograf and the membership of Camel and Tiger Moth Tales' Peter Jones.

"When you have a professor of history and literature writing lyrics, you can't help but have a love of books as a theme," Bandana says of US-based academic Brad Birzer. "The first album was about the friendship between CS Lewis and JRR Tolkien. The second was a story Brad wrote about TS Elliot. The new album, *What We Really Like In Stories*, is a series of songs about authors and their works."

Bandana – composer, co-ordinator, bassist and keyboardist – tries to avoid being a control freak.

"Although I have a vision for the songs, I always let everyone do what they feel is right," he says. "It's exciting to listen to their parts for the first time."

He heaps praise on Armstrong and Jones for their continued support.

"Robin took a huge gamble. I was looking for help on Facebook and he asked to hear what became the first album. He was very critical, but offered to mix and master it and release it on his label. When I was looking for a sax player in the BBT forum, Pete responded, 'Well, if it's only a small tootle' – the rest is history. He always has time for me. The guy oozes class. He came out to Lanzarote last year and played shows with me. Great fun!"

Asked to select an entry point to each album, Bandana picks *Legacies* from their self-titled debut for its two guitar solos, one by Armstrong; *The Burning Flame* from *Promises Of Hope*; and latest single *You've Written Poetry My Boy*, "probably Brad's best-ever lyric, and we have a fantastic video created by Rob Birnholz – another friend from the BBT forum".

"When we started the new one, we agreed the songs should be as concise and tightly arranged as possible," guitarist Gareth Cole says. "We wanted to focus on strong melodies, to use more backing vocals to create a really lush vibe."

He agrees with Bandana: "Without BBT there would quite simply be no Bardic Depths – but I doubt anyone in the band is particularly aware of us. I'd like to think Robin played a few snippets to Greg Spawton, who nodded sage approval... only joking!"

Although geographically challenged, the band hope to play live in the future, but first it might be nice to write together in the same physical space.

"We'd prefer to sit in a room and jam out songs," Cole says. "But since that's not possible we take a slower, very methodical approach. It suits the way we want to write and record – for now!"

Bandana deadpans that The Bardic Depths can't escape lyrics about literature.

"When I write, I always listen to music," Birzer reports. "And when writing lyrics, I'm always reading books. There's no compromise: words and music simply go well together." **MK**

PROG FILE

LINE-UP

Dave Bandana *(music, bass, keyboard)*, **Peter Jones** *(saxophone)*, **Gareth Cole** *(guitar)*, **Tim Gehrt** *(drums)*, **Brad Birzer** *(lyrics)*

SOUNDS LIKE

A bubbling cauldron of Big Big Train, Genesis, Cosmograf and Camel

CURRENT RELEASE

What We Really Like In Stories is out now via Bandcamp

WEBSITE

thebardicdepths.bandcamp.com

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Listen to THE BARDIC DEPTHS all this month on PROGZILLA RADIO
progzilla.com/listen/

"I'd like to think Robin played a few snippets to Greg Spawton, who nodded sage approval."

Some of the geographically challenged The Bardic Depths, L-R: Peter Jones, Dave Bandana, Gareth Cole.

PRESS/MARTIN HASKELL

EBB
5 APR - DUMFRIES
THE VENUE w/ THE MIND SWEEPERS
6 APR - EDINBURGH
O2 ACADEMY w/ HAWKWIND
7 APR - GLASGOW
O2 ACADEMY w/ HAWKWIND
12 APR - LOCKERBIE
THE LODGE ARTS COLLECTIVE w/ CANDACRAIG
25 MAY - SUTTON BENGER
OLD RECTORY HOUSE
30 MAY - NEWCASTLE
TRILLIANS w/ THE EMERALD DAWN
31 MAY - HULL
O'RILEYS w/ THE EMERALD DAWN
8 JUN - KIDDERMINSTER
LIVE 45 w/ ALSO EDEN
20 JUL - NUNEATON
THE QUEENS HALL w/ RUBY DAWN + BIG HOGG
21 JUL - SOUTHAMPTON
THE 1865 w/ BIG HOGG
22 JUL - LONDON
CAMDEN CLUB w/ HOGIA
10 AUG - STOKE-ON-TRENT
JOLLEE'S CABARET w/ JEANICELEE + TOURNIQUET
25 AUG - COLCHESTER
THE FERRIERS BARN
31 AUG - SANQUHAR
MUSIC AT THE MULTIVERSE
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PRESS/COURTNEY SCOUT

Enjoy weird songs with complicated segments? Check out Squeaky Feet!

SQUEAKY FEET

Quirky, upbeat jam band who don't shy away from getting weird.

"I HAVE A THEORY that all bandnames are bad," says Squeaky Feet guitarist and vocalist Colin Shore. "Once you've heard a name enough, you trick yourself into thinking it sounds cool. But I think Squeaky Feet is deceptive: it implies a dancey nature to our music, which we have, but people are always caught off-guard by how angular we are."

Formed by Berklee graduates ingratiated in the jam band scene in Denver's punter-packed bars, Squeaky Feet are built on surprises, even for themselves. And they were never meant to be a prog band.

"Prog, in the classic sense, wasn't on our radar," Shore admits. "But once we started playing together it just happened that we were making prog music. A big thing for me was when I started getting into Zappa. His arrangements were a big influence on how I started approaching writing. One thing I love about this band is that we don't have to think about limitations. I know that I can write the most insane nonsense and we can still come together to make sense of it."

Their sound nestles in a bustling bar of its own making, where Zappa is the barman, Snarky Puppy are hanging out in one corner and King Crimson are necking shots in another. Finding balance amid that chaos has been crucial in establishing a fluid sound, especially when their songs were honed onstage.

"As I write, I try to think about my own music tastes," says Shore. "For every Zappa song that I love, there are two that I can't stand, so I always try to figure out where the line is. I want prog fans to enjoy us, but I don't want other people to find it too far off the deep end."

Drummer Kevin D'Angelo, meanwhile, represents the carefree side of their coin.

"We're a band that will play 15/4 in a bar; we're relentlessly here to do our thing," he says with a smile. "We're not going to bend our sound just to get the listeners. We're OK if you hate us. We're going to play those weird songs and play complicated segments because it's cool."

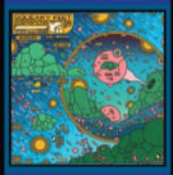
That cheekiness presides over their debut, *Cause For Alarm*. For example, second track *Chance To Grow* feels like it's going to be a three-minute pop tune but instead stretches into a nine-minute psych-rock epic. Even getting Snarky Puppy guitarist Mark Lettieri to guest on the album came from a cheeky 'What if?' moment.

"He was a big inspiration for that song, so we messaged him," Shore reflects. "He was super-approachable and proud to be part of it; we're super-grateful. He knocked his solo out of the park."

Having set the scene, they're looking to "strike while the iron is hot", with album two already being written. They're eager to further explore the weirdness that their jams conjure as they start to shape a bright and boisterous future for themselves. Watch this space! **POW**

"I can write the most insane nonsense and we can still make sense of it."

PROG FILE



LINE-UP

Colin Shore *(guitar, vocals)*, **Greg King** *(guitar)*, **Jimmy Finnegan** *(bass, vocals)*, **Brian Keller** *(keyboards, sax, flute, vocals)*, **Kevin D'Angelo** *(drums)*

SOUNDS LIKE

King Crimson crashing a Snarky Puppy house party and spiking the punch with psych rock

CURRENT RELEASE

Cause For Alarm is out now via Bandcamp

WEBSITE

www.squeakyfeetmusic.com

Q&A

RANDY McSTINE

From sharing the stage with Porcupine Tree to embracing the challenge of standing alone in the spotlight, the American guitarist discusses building a fanbase, feeling like a spectator, and the tug of war between pessimism and adventure.

Words: David West **Portrait:** Hajo Müller

Randy McStine is a man with his fingers in a lot of prog pies. From playing live in Porcupine Tree to solo shows opening for The Pineapple Thief and collaborations with Jane Getter Premonition and Dave Kerzner, McStine is fast becoming one of progressive rock's first call multi-instrumentalists and vocalists.

"I'm not looking for tabloid fame," says McStine. "I'm looking for a really respected body of work, a large enough audience-base to play nice venues, and to have a living, frankly."

His ambitions may be relatively modest, but his own music is anything but, borne out by his technically intimidating albums with drummer Marco Minnemann.

Does playing solo gigs, opening for The Pineapple Thief and Iamthemorning, help you to reach new listeners?
Definitely. When you play with a band of notoriety, you can have this assumption that just because you're playing in front of hundreds or thousands of people that you'll automatically get some massive overflow to your own work and the truth is that just doesn't happen. You have to stake your own ground and be out there doing the hard work. Social media, YouTube, all these things help but when it comes down to it, getting people to listen to your music and to come to a show is still a really difficult task. Doing a support slot, I don't have a band with me, it allows me to develop a solo show a bit deeper, to explore sonically. I've been doing a lot of things processing the acoustic guitar in interesting ways and I've got a keyboard set-up, a one-man station: it's artistically satisfying but it's also somewhat of a necessity business-wise.

"I've been incredibly fortunate to continue to make music with people who are so specialised."

Are you comfortable performing by yourself?
A lot of people come up to me after the show: "It's so brave that you're up there alone," and I like that challenge. I like the dynamic of it, you can bring things down to an absolute whisper then you hit a big chord and the whole thing just opens up.

I grew up playing in bands but somewhere in my late teens, early 20s, I started doing solo gigs and acoustic duos. You don't have other instruments to support you or to hide behind to take the hit. You're responsible for every note. I think so much of my growth has come from that, having to carry a show by yourself, because what are you going to do? Thirty minutes doesn't sound like a lot, but when you're stepping out on a stage in front of hundreds of people and the majority don't know who you are, they haven't paid to see you specifically, you could die a quick death up there if you're not connecting or doing something interesting.

Do you feel progressive music has a more accessible audience in the UK and Europe versus the US?
I think I'm learning that as I go. If I think about Porcupine Tree, we've played a lot of beautiful theatres and places in the US, but generally speaking when we got to Europe, they were double or triple the audience sizes. The difference is from a fan point of view, I think it's just something in American culture that people really want to go home with the T-shirts and the posters and your catalogue. Country to country is different.

On Instagram, you shared a photo of you record-shopping with Steven Wilson. Is he someone you consider to be a role model?
I do, I certainly do. It's not something I've really discussed with him because I guess I haven't felt the need to, but when I was approaching my mid-to-late teens, as a fan of progressive music, Porcupine Tree and Steven were the leading lights. One of my biggest admirations for Steven is his ability to channel so many of his musical interests and to move around stylistically and be pretty unapologetic about it. I share that artistic credo, which is to just follow your instincts and your muse and whatever happens to be inspiring to you in the moment. You should run towards that. Overall, just how he's been able to navigate what I think is an incredibly diverse and successful career, as somebody who is still not technically mainstream but to me has all of the successes that I could possibly think of wanting.

You have a productive studio partnership with Marco Minnemann on your recent *Unintentional* album and the two McStine & Minnemann records. Would you like to take that music on the road?
We would definitely like to tour. We met toward the end of 2018 — we were hired to do this project called In Continuum [with Dave Kerzner], we played a couple of live dates and really hit it off. Heading into 2020, we were throwing songs back and forth, that became our first record and we were so locked in we made a second record right away. We have a third one in the works, it's taken me forever to focus on it, so that's something that we'll complete this year, which I'm excited about.

We did a couple of live performances on Cruise To The Edge in 2022. We went out there with a four-piece: it was Marco and I, Nick D'Virgilio in a utility role. We had a second drum kit for him, but he mainly played guitar and keys. Obviously, Nick is a great singer, we've worked together a lot so that harmony blend was nice. And we had an amazing bassist, Mohini Dey, who continues to blow up. Her and Marco as a rhythm section is just completely otherworldly, they can go places where I have to step back and I'm just a spectator at that point. I've been incredibly fortunate to continue to make music with people who are so rare and specialised. You're listening and thinking, "I don't know if there is anybody else in the world right now who can do what you just did." I'd like to believe with the new record and more promotion we could finally put some dates together. I'm a bit risk-averse that way. I would hate for us to put all that effort in and have 20 people show up, but that's my pessimism. It's adventurous music and I'm hoping there's a way to get it out to more people.

Unintentional is available now on Bandcamp.
See rmcstine.bandcamp.com for more information

Bursting Out!

How Jethro Tull Conquered The US

In 1969, **Jethro Tull** embarked on their first great American adventure. Within the space of a few short years, they would swap modest-sized stages for packed-out shows at Madison Square Garden and Red Rocks Amphitheatre. Ian Anderson and Martin Barre look back on Tull's journey from mad-eyed bluesy Brits to the fully fledged stadium rock phenomenon that was second only to Led Zeppelin in the 70s.

Words: Dave Everley
Image: Lynn Goldsmith/Corbis/VCG via Getty Images

No one wants to be accidentally tear-gassed onstage, but there are definitely worse places for it to happen than Red Rocks Amphitheatre.

It was June 10, 1971, and Jethro Tull were headlining this beautiful, 10,000-capacity open-air venue built into the natural sandstone formations south of Denver, Colorado. This was the band's eighth US tour in the two-and-half-years since they'd first set foot in North America, a work rate they would sustain throughout the coming decade.

Such was the scale of Tull's US success that demand for tickets for the Red Rocks show outstripped supply.

Jethro Tull fans make their feelings very clear, circa 1975.

Dozens of ticketless fans gathered outside the venue's gates, hoping to cajole, sweet-talk or simply force their way in. The local police department, there to keep some semblance of order, were having none of it. Simmering tensions boiled over, and a riot broke out. That's when the cops busted out the tear gas.

"This riot was happening outside the venue, so we weren't aware of what was going on," says long-serving Tull guitarist Martin Barre, who played with the band from 1968 to 2011.

"We were onstage when they started tear gassing people. Because of the geographical layout, the tear gas was funnelled into the auditorium, so it got the whole audience and the band as we were playing. It's very unpleasant. It makes you completely inoperable as a human being. It was only afterwards that we were told, 'There's a riot, the police are here, you've got to get out of the venue.' It was horrible."

> "Ian's flute playing was the hallmark of the band, and that in itself got us into people's aural space. The sound we were producing was unique."
>
> **Martin Barre**

According to contemporary reports, the band managed to play for 80 minutes that night, but the fact that Jethro Tull were big enough to sell out a venue as big as Red Rocks in the first place, let alone prompt a riot on the night itself, is remarkable. Received wisdom has it that the likes of Led Zeppelin, the Rolling Stones and, later, Elton John, Bad Company and Fleetwood Mac were the dominant British bands in the US throughout the 1970s, especially when it came to the live arena.

True enough, but Jethro Tull were up there with them, too. Between their first American gigs at the start of 1969 and the end of the following decade, they went from playing clubs and small ballrooms, opening for Blood, Sweat & Tears and Spirit, to headlining sports stadiums and multiple nights at arenas — in 1978, they played a run of five shows at New York's Madison Square Garden, to a total of nearly 100,000 people.

Their live success was mirrored by their record sales and chart

Bringing the energy: Tull onstage in the US in 1976.

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

positions. Tull notched up 10 US Top 20 studio albums between 1969 and 1978, including two No.1s in the unlikely shape of 1972's concept album satire *Thick As A Brick* and the following year's darker, knottier *A Passion Play*. The scale of Jethro Tull's American success is often overlooked today, but these wild Brits with the mad-eyed singer who stood on one leg while playing flute to unique, complex, thoughtful songs were bona fide rock stars in the USA during the 1970s, albeit reluctant ones.

"For a little period of time we were quite big," says Tull frontman Ian Anderson, never a man given to overstatement. "I think the thing that sold us was that we didn't try too hard. We worked hard, but we said, 'Take it or leave it.' That's what happened with The Beatles – they were irreverent and not showbizzy. With Led Zeppelin, they did what they wanted to do. We had this notion of, 'We're not doing it for you, we're doing it for us.' There's something strange about that, in that audiences seem to appreciate it. When people try too hard, it can go horribly wrong."

Tull's great American adventure began in mid-January 1969. That was when they arrived in New York City, having flown across the Atlantic on a TWA Boeing 707.

"Stuck right at the back," recalls Barre, who had played his first gig with Tull just a couple of weeks earlier, on December 30, 1968. "Bubbling with excitement."

Their first two US gigs took place on January 24 and 25, 1969, opening for headliners Blood Sweat & Tears at the Fillmore East, the venue in Manhattan's Lower East Side run by promoter Bill Graham. The Stateside rock cognoscenti knew who they were – kids hip to the wave of post-Cream blues-rock coming across the Atlantic picked up import versions of their 1968 debut album, *This Was*, featuring original guitarist Mick Abrahams. But those who turned up were perplexed to find the old men on the sleeve – actually Tull in pensioner get-up – were nowhere to be seen.

"They were quite shocked and upset: 'Hang on a minute, you're not like the album cover, where are those guys?'" says Barre. "They thought the cover picture was real. But we won them over."

It was the same story as Tull wound their way across the States over the next four months, ticking cities off along the way: Detroit, Chicago,

> "For me it's never, 'Oh wow, I'm playing in this venue.' It doesn't work like that. You're tunnel-visioned into thinking, on a split-second basis of what's coming up next, who this person over here is. Your brain is cueing up foot pedals or trying to remember what I have to sing – thousands of words every night, hopefully in the right order."
>
> **Ian Anderson**

POPSIE RANDOLPH/MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES/GETTY IMAGES

Boston, Minneapolis, New Haven, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles. Sometimes they headlined, sometimes they opened for other acts, among them Mitch Ryder, Spirit and, at a couple of shows, Vanilla Fudge and the similarly unknown Led Zeppelin. (Tull would support Zeppelin at several of the latter's own headlining shows later in 1969.)

"We were an opening act, but it set the ball rolling," says Anderson. "Word got about via promoters as well as the media and the public. It was all word of mouth."

One of these was Don Law, a young promoter based in Boston who ran the Tea Party, a 750-capacity venue.

"I remember hearing about this musician who played the flute on one leg: 'Really? Played the flute on one leg?'" he tells *Prog*. "We were sceptical, but there was a pipeline of British acts that had come through and exploded in popularity. We booked them to play the Tea Party and they were just fabulous. When they came back the next time a few months later, there were lines down the street because there was so much demand."

Not everyone was blown away by Jethro Tull, though.

"The West Coast was harder for us," says Anderson. "We didn't fit the culture. The music they liked was more hippie and laid-back. In industrial cities like Chicago and Detroit, things were more hard-edged, and we had a bit more recognition early on."

Some of the bands they played were equally unimpressed by these Limey weirdos. In Seattle, Tull opened up for rabble-rousing garage-punks the MC5.

New York, 1968: Jethro Tull and record label executives pose with *This Was*.

"They were fabulous, but they hated us," remembers Barre. "Their behaviour towards us was not very nice. Years later, when we met up again, we were wary of them, but they apologised for how they behaved. They were just angry young kids who resented us."

America's proto-punks may have recoiled, but the music-loving public quickly embraced Jethro Tull. Released in the US in February 1969, *This Was* eventually reached No.62 in the Billboard 200. Follow-up *Stand Up*, released that August, did even better, breaking into the US Top 20. By the end of 1969, they had played more than 90 shows on three separate North American tours, establishing themselves as a headline act capable of pulling in several thousand people each time.

Part of the reason for Tull's growing success was that they offered something different to the thunder of Led Zeppelin and the other British blues rockers that arrived on America's shores in their wake.

"People were intrigued by who we were and what we were doing," says Barre. "Ian's flute playing was the hallmark of the band, and that in itself got us into people's aural space. The sound we were producing was unique. It wasn't like dozens and dozens of other bands, churning out blues and rock'n'roll. We were quirky, and Americans like eccentrics."

It wasn't just Tull's sound and look that was propelling them ever higher. The US radio landscape had changed in the late 60s. Where it had once been dominated by starchy AM stations playing the pop hits of the day, the FM format was becoming increasingly powerful, allowing DJs more latitude to experiment with different styles of music, give airtime to new acts and spin album tracks. Like many of their peers, Tull were beneficiaries of this cultural shift.

"One song in particular, *Teacher* [from the US edition of 1970's *Benefit* album], got a lot of radio play," says Anderson. "It crossed over into AM radio from FM radio."

Tull's growing profile was reflected in the venues they were playing. In Boston, they had already made the huge leap straight from the Tea Party to the 15,000-capacity Boston Garden, home of both the city's ice hockey team the Boston Bruins and their basketball counterparts the Celtics.

"It was evident that they could make that jump," says Don Law, who continues to promote Tull and Anderson in Boston today. "It was risky but they were so popular, they'd blown up the market and it warranted taking that risk. Their music was different in the sense that it wasn't a screaming guitar, long solos or long drum solos or playing at 110 decibels all the time – it was more lyrical, more creative. People wanted something different."

The pattern of jumping up to bigger venues was repeated across the country, but Tull weren't overawed by the prospect of stepping up to much larger venues. They'd played in front of big audiences early in their career, appearing in front of several thousand people at the first ever outdoor show at London's Hyde Park in June 1968, propping up a bill that featured Tyrannosaurus Rex (as they were then called), Roy Harper and headliners Pink Floyd, and playing to an even bigger crowd at the Sunbury Jazz And Blues Festival a few weeks later.

DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Trouble at Red Rocks and news of Tull's first ever Madison Square Garden gig.

JETHRO TULL

IN U.S RIOTS

Like World War Three

by JACOBA ATLAS

Tull to play Madison Gardens gig

JETHRO: 'NEW' TULL LP NEXT MONTH MILLION U.S. SALES

JETHRO TULL ARCHIVES

"Their music was different in the sense that it wasn't a screaming guitar, long solos or long drum solos or playing at 110 decibels all the time – it was more lyrical, more creative. People wanted something different."

Don Law (US promoter)

Safe to say, the American fans had never seen anything quite like Tull!

Jethro Tull in 1971. Top row, L-R: Martin Barre, Barriemore Barlow, Jeffrey Hammond. Bottom row: Ian Anderson, John Evan.

An audience of 10,000 people and upwards wasn't going to faze someone as pragmatic as Anderson.

"Somewhere along the way, you get used to it," says the singer of facing large crowds in huge venues. "For me it's never, 'Oh wow, I'm playing in this venue.' It doesn't work like that. You're tunnel-visioned into thinking, on a split-second basis, of what's coming up next, who this person over here is. Your brain is cueing up foot pedals or trying to remember what I have to sing – thousands of words every night, hopefully in the right order."

They weren't idle offstage either.

"In 1969, I bought a guitar in New York that I always carried with me on tour," says Anderson. "On those days off or [when you have] time to kill, you could sit down and try a few ideas or write songs. A lot of the albums were at least 50 per cent written in hotel and motel rooms on the road."

The title track of Tull's breakthrough 1971 album, *Aqualung*, was a direct product of those long American tours.

"I was on the road somewhere in the USA and I was playing around with this guitar riff and weird chord sequence," says Anderson. "I phoned Martin Barre in his room and said, 'Can you come up here? Bring your guitar.' I said, 'Learn this riff.' [Sings opening riff to *Aqualung*.] I played it on the acoustic guitar: 'At soundcheck, can we just play that?' And he said, 'I don't have an acoustic guitar with me.' 'No, no, not on acoustic guitar – turn it up all the way, full power chords and stuff.' So we ran it at soundcheck, and that's how that particular song was born."

Aqualung was a significant staging post in Tull's American rise. It became their first US Top 10 album, while the title track and *Locomotive Breath* were picked up by FM radio, putting the band on even more people's radars.

"By 1971, we were pretty well established over there," says Anderson. "We had many notable bands who played with us in that period of time."

The list of acts who opened for Tull during the late 60s and early 70s reads like a Who's Who of the era: Grand Funk Railroad, Mountain, the Peter Green-led Fleetwood Mac and Joe Cocker (on the same bill), Mott The Hoople, Gentle Giant, and even Yes.

"In the very early days, it was very competitive," says Barre. "You had to try and blow away the main band. But then we realised there was room for everybody. Everybody could have a piece of cake. By the time we toured with Yes, we got on with them really well."

Not every pairing was so successful. In June 1972, emerging country rockers the Eagles opened for Tull at a few West Coast shows.

BARRIE WENTZELL

House d'Horror!

Ian Anderson and Martin Barre recount the cursed 'Chateau D'isaster' sessions that produced a different kind of bum note.

The Château d'Hérouville, an 18th-century house located on the northern outskirts of Paris, was one of the most prestigious studios of the early 1970s. It was there, in August 1972, that Tull began work on the follow-up to *Thick As A Brick*.

"Cat Stevens and Elton John had recorded landmark albums there, so we assumed it'd be OK," says Ian Anderson. "Little did we know..."

Thick As A Brick's transatlantic success had shifted things up a gear for Tull. There was talk of the band relocating to Switzerland for tax reasons, and Anderson rented an apartment in Montreux in preparation. It was there that he began writing music for Tull's next record, centred around a broad lyrical theme.

"It started off likening various traits of animals to human traits, drawing those playful comparisons between animal behaviour and human behaviour," he says. "That probably wasn't going to apply to everything, but it was certainly the starting point. But it was an attempt to do something a little more frivolous and upbeat."

Plans to record it at a local studio were scuppered when it was booked out by the Rolling Stones. "So we went to the château instead," explains Anderson.

That's where the problems started. The Château d'Hérouville was less a grand palace, more of a run-down mansion with creaky old recording technology and little in the way of maintenance, or space for that matter.

"Certain members of the band and crew had to share dormitory space, which was far from ideal," says Anderson.

For two weeks, they attempted to put meat on the bones of the ideas that Ian Anderson had brought, but it was a very frustrating process.

"We were in a very positive place musically," recalls Martin Barre. "Ian had some great songs and great ideas. But the studio kept constantly breaking down and interrupting the flow of music."

Matters weren't helped by the conditions in which they were living.

The three master tape reels recorded at the Château d'Hérouville are now a double vinyl album, remixed by Steven Wilson.

MASTERTAPES: WARNER ARCHIVES

"It [was] altogether unpleasant," says Anderson. "One or two people got scabies from dirty bed linen."

Worst of all was the dining situation. The menu consisted of dodgy camembert and brie, plus unidentified "mystery meat" – which was later discovered to be horse – washed down with red wine with inches-thick sediment at the bottom of each bottle. Inevitably, their delicate British systems couldn't take it.

"Everybody was struck down with explosive diarrhoea," says Barre. "We'd be doing a take, then you'd hear an 'Ohhhhh' and the clatter of drumsticks and that'd be Barrie [Barriemore Barlow, drummer] running to the nearest toilet. It was horrific."

> "Ian had some great songs and great ideas. But the studio kept constantly breaking down."
>
> **Martin Barre**

Things got so bad that bassist Jeffrey Hammond nicknamed the place 'the Shâteau d'Hérouville'.

After two or three weeks of this, they had all had enough.

"I passed a vote among the band: 'Who wants to stay in Europe and find somewhere else, who wants to record in London?'" says Anderson. "It was two and two: two of them quite liked living in Switzerland and two of them wanted to go home and see their mums. So the casting vote was down to me. I thought, 'Let's all go back to London and start again in Morgan Studios', where we'd recorded *Thick As A Brick*."

Rather than revisit the music they'd worked on in the château, Anderson elected to write and record a whole new set of songs.

"I rejected everything from the château sessions, aside from one piece, which cropped up on the *War Child* album [the single *Bungle In The Jungle*]," says Anderson. "I just thought we needed a clean sheet."

"We probably groaned, but it was a more positive approach to start again," adds Barre.

Anderson wrote the album that would become *A Passion Play* "very quickly at home... it had a more downbeat and rather serious theme, in contrast to the frivolous, upbeat material we'd attempted in the château."

He estimates that the finished album came out at more or less the same time as they originally planned for the scrapped version.

"It was just a case of, 'Well, we'd better get on with it and start again', so we did. We probably lost about three or four weeks in the wasted session in the château, but we pushed ahead with the replacement as fast as we could."

On its release in July 1973, *A Passion Play* followed *Thick As A Brick* to No.1 in the US. Some of material recorded at the Château d'Hérouville – amusingly christened '*The Château D'isaster Sessions*' – finally saw the light of day as part of 1993's *Nightcap* album, with Anderson adding new flute parts in place of missing vocal and melody lines. A fuller collection of songs from the ill-fated sessions was released in 2014 as *The Château D'Hérouville Sessions* and mixed by Steven Wilson (this has just been released on vinyl for the first time).

"I can't say we're all tittering at the idea of queuing up for the loo while people evacuated their bowels," says Anderson. "But you have to look back on it with a sense of humour." **DEV**

"They wanted to do it because it was exposure," says Anderson. "They didn't enjoy the tour – they seemed rather remote. I remember them being kind of laid-back, country rock music. It wasn't really music that was gelling with our audiences, who could be rather spiky."

Falling equally flat was Captain Beefheart. Don Van Vliet – aka Beefheart himself – called Anderson personally to ask if his band could open a short run of shows in late 1972.

"I was in a hotel room late at night, trying to sleep and the phone went," says Anderson. "There was a voice on the other end: [adopts gravelly American accent] 'Hey, this is your Captain.' I went, 'What?' 'This is your Captain. Captain Beefheart.' 'Oh, right…'"

Anderson was a fan of Beefheart's music, but he suspected they would be a poor fit for a Tull crowd.

"I tried to talk him out of it. I said, 'The thing is, our audience can be kind of mean to people if they don't like them.' He promised me: 'Don't worry, we'll play mainstream stuff, make it audience-friendly.'"

The first gig with Beefheart in tow, at the Civic Centre in Springfield, Massachusetts, confirmed Anderson's fears.

"The beginning of the show was a little bit weird and esoteric, and the audience immediately started disliking what was going on. And Captain Beefheart had a tendency to shout and talk down to the audience. They just didn't like him."

Beefheart fared better than another opening act, The Sensational Alex Harvey Band.

"It was disastrous," says Anderson. "They hated Alex Harvey from the word go, and it got worse and worse. He then lost his temper and called them various types of four-letter word, which made things even worse. I remember in Seattle, 11,000 people got to their feet as one and began making this noise. It wasn't booing, it was the scariest noise you've ever heard. He'd just upset them unbelievably."

At least Roxy Music, who opened for Tull at Madison Square Garden in 1972, were merely met with stony silence.

The singer eventually began to actively dissuade other artists from supporting Tull. Roy Harper was one.

"I said, 'Roy, you won't be speaking to me after the first week because you'll be so upset with the audiences,'" says Anderson.

JETHRO TULL ARCHIVES

> "There was so much pomp in rock music at the time: tight pants, flowing hair, hairy chests with medallions, all that 'look at me' stuff. We hated it."
>
> **Martin Barre**

A few years later, Ian Dury was another who didn't fare well.

"I had to talk him out of it because of other experiences. Just because I like the act, doesn't mean our audience will."

Tull themselves could do no wrong in the eyes of their American fans. Even *Thick As A Brick* was embraced Stateside, an impressive feat for a record shot through with a distinctly British strain of humour and eccentricity. Naturally, the band took the news of it reaching No.1 on the other side of the Atlantic in their stride.

"We never patted each other on the back, ever," says Barre. "That's just the way we were. We weren't self-satisfied, we didn't rest on our laurels."

The Thick As A Brick tour saw Tull doubling down on their eccentric streak. Their epic, three-hour set was part rock show, part surreal vaudeville performance, owing as much to *Monty Python* as it did rock'n'roll. The show opened with a group of people in rubberised riding coats who began sweeping the floor and inspecting the venue before gradually drifted offstage until only five people remained, who turned out to be Tull themselves. Elsewhere, the show featured a man in a scuba diving outfit walking across the stage and keyboard player John Evan reading the news in a rabbit costume, among other things.

"It came about because there was so much pomp in rock music at the time," says Barre. "Tight pants, flowing hair, hairy chests with medallions, all that 'look at me' stuff. We hated it. This was sort of our protest at all of that. We couldn't take ourselves that seriously. We were five or six ugly guys up on a stage. We wanted people to laugh at us. We had carte blanche to do whatever we wanted to do and we all chipped in with stupid ideas. I guess we got carried away."

Such a theatrical performance with so many moving parts inevitably led to some proto-Spinal Tap moments. At one point, the band decided to swap the rubber riding coats for rabbit costumes, only to find that the zips wouldn't work and they spent the first few minutes of the show attempting to wriggle out of them. Another time, John Evan put a rabbit head over his own head, not realising someone had accidentally knocked a beer can full of urine into it. Barre can remember the scream he made now.

"The American audiences loved it," the guitarist says of their OTT live extravaganza. "They forgave us because we were crazy Englishmen."

Offstage, it was a different matter. Tull were content to leave the debauchery to other bands. When they'd toured with Led Zeppelin at in 1969, Jimmy Page took great delight in showing Anderson photos of groupies with fruits and other foodstuffs strategically placed around their bodies. There was no such behaviour backstage at Tull's own shows.

"Groupies?" says Barre with a laugh. "You've got to bear in mind what we looked like. It was very male-orientated, a weird men's club with wacky humour. We took a table tennis table on the road and played table tennis until we went onstage."

But behind the bonhomie, Anderson was growing increasingly frustrated with Tull shows – specifically the reactions from audiences.

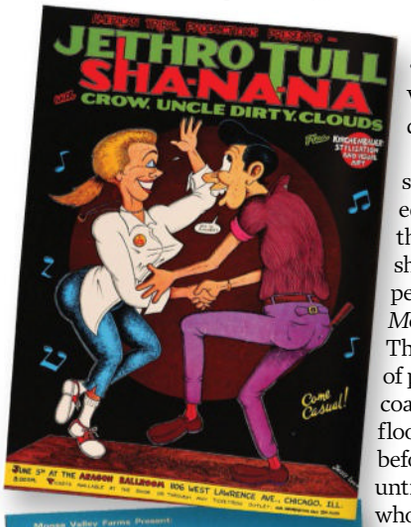
"I came back from a year of touring *Thick As A Brick* feeling quite disillusioned about performing, particularly in the USA," he says. "If there was a quiet acoustic section, of which in *Thick As A Brick* there were many, it was an opportunity for people to shout and whistle and hoot and generally interrupt me. I actually said I was quitting at one point, and I was quite serious for about two weeks."

For all his unhappiness, Tull's career had an unstoppable momentum to it. *A Passion Play*, recorded from scratch after an ill-fated session at the Château d'Hérouville in Paris (aka the 'Château D'isaster', see House d'Horror! sidebar, p35), gave the band their second consecutive No.1 album in the US.

Back home, *A Passion Play* saw Tull's relatively convivial relationship with the British press hit a bump. *Melody Maker*'s Chris Welch, previously a staunch supporter of the band, had turned in a critical review of the live UK première of the album at London's Empire Pool in June 1973, a month before the record was released, calling it "very poor music indeed" (the songs had previously been played in the US, to a less vituperative response). The reception that greeted the album itself in was no less disdainful. "An intellectual tease inflated with portent but devoid of wonder," sneered *Rolling Stone*.

RICHARD E. AARON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

US tour posters with Tull headlining.



GAB ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

The bubble showing no signs of bursting: Ian Anderson and Martin Barre onstage at Madison Square Garden, October 11, 1979.

"We didn't force a connection, it just happened."

Steve Howe remembers a fledgling Yes supporting Jethro Tull in America back in 1971.

By the middle of 1971, Jethro Tull had made real inroads in North America, headlining to several thousand people every night. On June 24 of that year, they began a month-long tour of the US and Canada. Supporting them was none other than Yes – then on the rise, but yet to make the same commercial breakthrough as Tull. Yes's long-serving guitarist looks back on a tour that saw the two bands planting the flag of progressive rock in American soil.

Steve Howe back in 1971.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

Did you know Jethro Tull before you supported them in the US?
I remember seeing them on *Top Of The Pops* because Ian was such a flamboyant performer. They were the kind of band who did what the hell they liked – they mixed the progressive and the psychedelic and the folk and everything else. They found their own style.

How did you end up on that US tour?
We were very keen on making a mark in America. We'd seen what Tull had done – at that point they'd already done six or seven American tours. To us, they were streaks ahead of us. But we had ambition, and [Yes's label] Atlantic connected us with [heavyweight US booking agency] Premier Talent. They put us with Jethro Tull – that was perfect for us.

Your first show opening for Tull was in Edmonton, Canada, on June 24, 1971. What do you remember about it?
Edmonton was quite a small city then, compared to New York or Toronto. There were big models of buffalo everywhere – it was very Canadian. When we walked on that stage, we knew this was a huge opportunity for us. We were very confident.

Did you socialise with Tull offstage?
We were two proggy acts, and we were very comfortable with each other. We didn't force a connection, it just happened. It made it so much easier, it meant we could get on backstage. We were amazed that Ian had his stage outfit in a box about two foot square. When it first appeared in the dressing room, we went, "Wait, you keep your clothes in there?" In those days we carried our own stage clothes around in a suit bag.

Was there any competition?
Every band has an ego: "We're the best band." We enjoyed being with Tull, but when Yes went onstage, we thought we were very important. And we were – we had a great chemistry. It wasn't, "Oh, we're going to blow you offstage", but it was a confidence that the music gave us, and it was the same with Tull.

How did you go down on that tour?
I think we shocked people to a degree. I'm not saying we were world-shattering, but I think we gave them something they knew they hadn't really had before. There was a lot of interest.

Why did American audiences connect with bands such as Yes and Jethro Tull at that time?
It goes back to the individual way we each played our music. Both bands had this almost kinky, post-psychedelic, mixed-up music. You did need a tweaked ear to get into some of the complexities in some of things we did, and people liked it: "I've found my band."

How significant was it in terms of prog in the US?
It was very significant. Tull had broken through and they were bringing another band who had the potential to break through as well. It was quite a formula. **DEV**

In the wake of the poor reviews, *Melody Maker* broke the news that Tull were quitting – in reality a scam cooked up between manager Terry Ellis and *Melody Maker* editor Ray Coleman that Anderson only heard about when he spotted a copy of the magazine on a newsstand. It's something the singer still sounds aggrieved about today.

"It just made it sound like we'd stomped off into the sunset because of some bad reviews," he says.

In North America, falling out with the media wasn't such a big issue, largely because any relationship Tull had with the music press by that point was distant at best. *Rolling Stone* wrote about the band favourably in their early days, and even put Anderson on the cover in July 1971, but by the time of *A Passion Play*, what affection there was had curdled.

"*Rolling Stone* hated Jethro Tull from the word go, because the main man [founder and publisher Jann Wenner] resented the British invasion," insists Anderson. "He didn't like Jethro Tull, he didn't like Led Zeppelin, he didn't like Emerson, Lake & Palmer or Yes. There was a time where we were getting really panned in America in certain magazines."

The US fans who bought tickets in their tens of thousands didn't care what the press thought. The tour in support of *A Passion Play* swapped much of the *Python*-esque goombahing of the *Thick As A Brick* shows for arty visuals and projected footage, including a 30-minute intro film that began with a slowly pulsing white dot that eventually gave way to film of a ballerina representing the figure on the album cover.

"I always hated doing multiple shows. It's too déjà vu. You played a show last night, here you are again in the same dressing room, same place, you're doing a second show or a third show. I didn't enjoy it then, I don't enjoy it now, so I make sure it doesn't happen these days."

Unfortunately for him, he had little choice back then. The tour miles began to rack up – more than 80 North American shows in 1973, none in 1974, but a staggering 113 in 1975, the latter in support of both the previous year's *War Child* album and its follow-up, *Minstrel In The Gallery*. Their stock was bolstered by the single *Bungle In The Jungle*, which reached No.12 in the States in early 1976, their last big US radio hit.

The Minstrel In The Gallery tour marked the end of bassist Jeffrey Hammond's time in the band. Still, he bowed out with a flourish, wearing a striking black-and-white striped suit, with matching zebra-striped bass. The theme continued in the form of a pantomime horse-style zebra that wandered onstage during the show.

"It was two roadies dressed up in a zebra suit," says Barre. "The zebra pooed out tennis balls and Jeffrey used to juggle with them. Totally stupid, but it was us being self-deprecating and saying, 'We're stood onstage in front of 20,000 people for pretty well no reason, but we're going to entertain you.'"

Hammond was replaced by John Glascock, formerly of Tull support act Carmen, who joined the band for 1976's *Too Old To Rock'N'Roll: Too Young To Die!*. Glascock was more of a party animal than most of his bandmates (something that would sadly contribute to his death in 1979 at the age of just 28). For Anderson himself, the arduous touring schedule was beginning to take a toll.

"I think the thing that sold us was that we didn't try too hard. We worked hard, but we said, 'Take it or leave it.'"

Ian Anderson

Tull's presentational ambition was matched by the scale of their itinerary. In 1973, they played four nights at the LA Forum and two at Madison Square Garden, with dozens of equally large venues in between. Anderson admits they weren't unaware of how the competition were doing.

"Elton John had done something like three nights at the Garden and two at the LA Forum," he says. "We were trying to outdo each other, because Elton was a biggie, a huge pop act."

For the singer, the fact that Tull were big enough to headline multiple nights at the same venue wasn't all it was cracked up to be.

"If I do a show, I want to wake up the next morning at seven o'clock and get the hell out of there," says Anderson.

"It was progressively affecting people," says Anderson. "We were there to do the job, but with the lifestyle of being on tour and being in hotels and all the travel, it was becoming more of a disagreeable way of living your life. I don't think it was a question of not having any say in the matter, it's just that we were persuaded by our manager that this was the opportunity, this was the time, and if you don't capitalise on it now, then it will slip away."

BARRIE WENTZELL

Musically, *Too Old To Rock'N'Roll...* was the end of a chapter for Tull. Inspired by a book the band's publicist, Jo Lustig, had given Anderson, their next album, 1977's *Songs From The Wood*, took British folklore and mythology as its jumping-off point, taking a turn towards rustic folk rock. It could be read as a retreat from Tull's American success, and North America itself.

"I'm not really sure about that," counters Anderson. "It was more about looking for something more indigenous that I could find a relationship with. At that point, I was trying incorporate ideas that had to do with my own musical heritage, and that of the UK, in terms of folk music."

Even if *Songs From The Wood* had been an attempt to consciously uncouple from the USA, they failed. It reached No.8 in the Billboard charts, while Tull's pulling power as a live band was undiminished. The tour in support of the following year's *Heavy Horses* saw them playing a remarkable run of five shows at Madison Square Garden in October of that year. It's an achievement that Anderson plays down.

"Playing multiple shows at Madison Square Garden is not a milestone, it is capitalising on the number of people who want to see you play," he says with admirable lack of sentimentality.

Songs From The Wood and *Heavy Horses*, together with 1978's *Bursting Out* live album, represented the pinnacle of Tull's US success. The third part of the so-called 'folk trilogy', 1979's *Stormwatch*, reached No.22 in the US charts, the first Tull studio album not to make the Top 20 since *This Was*. They were still playing arenas, convention centres and sports stadiums, but things were slightly scaled back — just over 60 North American dates, across two legs. Change was in the air, and Tull were ready to change with it. When they returned late the following year, it was in radically retooled form with the synth-heavy *A* album.

In the years since, the band have undergone numerous changes in sound, style and personnel, with only Anderson remaining from their 70s heyday. Their American success back then can be measured in more than just chart positions and ticket sales. The imprint they had on a generation is evident in more unexpected ways — witness Bart Simpson's classmate Martin Prince Jr singing a snippet *Thick Of Brick* in a 2006 episode of *The Simpsons* (creator Matt Groening was 18 in 1972), or Will Ferrell's hilarious performance of *Aqualung* as hapless newscaster Ron Burgundy in *Anchorman* (the 56-year-old Ferrell was a child of the 70s). Both are funny, for sure, but done with love, and proof of the cultural footprint Jethro Tull left at the time.

A band of a different stripe: Ian Anderson and the zebra-clad Jeffrey Hammond on the Minstrel In The Gallery tour, 1975.

This particular Anglo-American relationship has endured more than 55 years. Both Tull and Barre still regularly play the US, though the mega-tours of old are a distant memory.

"We worked really hard," says Barre. "Nothing came easy. We weren't given anything on a plate. We earned everything. But so what? So do 99 per cent of people. I'm privileged to be a working musician, having got to travel around the world, and still doing it."

For Ian Anderson, one of the things he's proudest of about Tull's huge US success in the 1970s was that they achieved it on their own terms.

"That's important to me, to have made it on the basis of doing something where we didn't hitch our wagon to American musical styles, and we were successful anyway because of that take-it-or-leave it attitude that came across onstage. It's a very big thing to have become successful in the USA. I'm reminded of the fact that we have a lot of loyal fans who to this day are very supportive and very happy to see us whenever we go over there."

The Château D'Hérouville Sessions is out now on vinyl via Warner. See jethrotull.com for more information.

Devin Townsend is revealing all.

"I ended up going down this avenue of thinking that I knew it all, and that it was my responsibility to tell everybody in my life what they were doing wrong."

There's a rare moment of pause from Devin Townsend.

"Please try not to make this sensationalistic," the progressive metal maverick asks, looking right down the lens of his video camera. "What I'm trying to do with expressing this is to help people who are going through something similar. If this comes across as, 'I did this many drugs, I was a fucking crazy person and they put me in a mental institution,' that's really going to do a disservice to this."

You can understand Townsend's apprehension. He and *Prog* are on a video-call today to talk about his 1998 solo album *Infinity*, which has been remastered and re-released for its 25th anniversary. And, as the singer/multi-instrumentalist just summarised, the story behind the record is a sensitive one.

Knowing Devin Townsend's work is almost a prerequisite for being a progressive metal fan in the 21st century. The Canadian polymath entered the public consciousness in 1993, singing for Steve Vai on the virtuoso's *Sex & Religion* album. For most artists, that venture (at which point Townsend was barely in his 20s) would surely have been an unassailable career highlight. However, Townsend's influence and myriad projects since have turned it into more of a footnote.

The musician earned prominence on his own terms with the extreme metal outlet Strapping Young Lad in the mid-1990s, then began

The Learning curve

In 1998, **Devin Townsend** released *Infinity*: his first album under his own name. The record refined his immense yet melodic prog and became one of his most celebrated releases. It also pulled the polymath back from a crisis of ego that had put him in hospital. Three decades on, to coincide with the groundbreaking record's 25th-anniversary reissue, Townsend looks back on its troubled creation and admits, "I couldn't have done any better."

Words: Matt Mills **New Portraits:** Tom Hawkins

contrasting the band's roaring and riffing with the immense yet melodic textures of his solo music. Since Strapping Young Lad were dissolved in 2007, Townsend's dedicated himself to the Devin Townsend Project (an extension of his solo career from 2009 to 2017), country one-off Casualties Of Cool (2014) and a pair of pandemic-era ambient records. His discography is currently 26 studio albums long, and for most entries you'll find loyalists declaring it his greatest and/or most impactful work.

Townsend, however, downplays his legacy with typical Canadian humility.

"None of my albums are important," he flatly says, speaking from his home in Vancouver. "Not even one of them. I think the thing that's important is the journey."

There's an exception to that blanket statement, however, and he adds: "As a roadmap, and as a flag on that journey, *Infinity* was important."

When it came out in 1998, the album was the first to bear Townsend's real name (his two prior solo records, *Cooked On Phonics* and *Biomech*, were released under the pseudonyms Punky Brüster and Ocean Machine, respectively). It became his first music post-Vai to chart when it reached No.29 in Japan, and it pushed his progressive potential, previously only heard on *Biomech*, to greater levels.

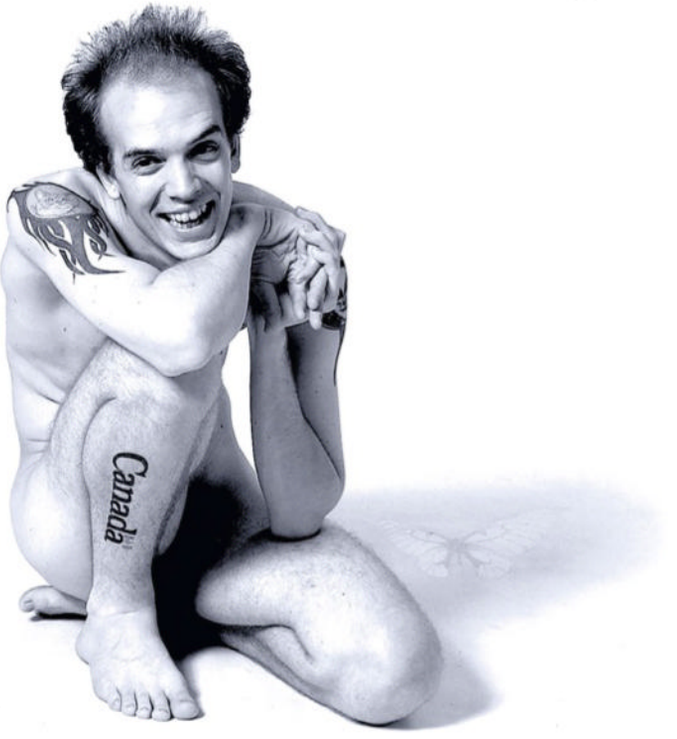
Infinity's opener, *Truth*, both reintroduced and ramped up Townsend's now-distinct wall-of-sound production. Dense layers of guitars, keyboards and multitracked vocals explode from both the song and the rest of the album, to the point that Townsend later interrupts *War* to cry, *'Just stop the noise for once, please!'* Elsewhere, *Christeen* and *Bad Devil* still represent some of the musician's most listenable material, casting memorable choruses against Broadway-scale symphonics and saxophone solos. *Biomech* may have built the mould for the sound of Townsend's solo work, but it was *Infinity* that set the standard every follow-up had to reach.

This isn't the kind of importance Townsend is talking about, though. In the lead-up to the album, the then-25-year-old developed what he today describes as "martyr syndrome": the condition led to a greatly inflated sense of self-importance and then, for a brief period, time in a mental health hospital. It wasn't until *Infinity* was finished that he gained a more grounded perspective on the world. Although his drinking and drug use at the time compounded the problem, Townsend's eager to point out that it was not the root cause.

"*Infinity* was the first solo album that I had done," he explains. "[*Biomech*] was more of a conglomeration of demos and things from a period prior but, with *Infinity*, I produced it, I engineered it, I mixed it, and I wasn't familiar with that process. As a result of that, I thought that album was so important, so significant, that I was on a mission. Because I was self-deprecating and insecure and arrogant, I interpreted that mission that I was on as being like, 'You're doing God's work!'"

Townsend traces what caused that way of thinking all the way back to when he was young. The future prog idol was born on May 5, 1972, to a nursery teacher mum and a steel worker dad. Raised in what he describes as "the boonies", he was an isolated child, and he grew up unsure of how to express his feelings in a healthy way.

"My grandparents were from the UK and my grandfather from Ireland," Townsend remembers, "so there was this kind of 'stiff upper lip' thing, emotionally. Certain overt displays



***Infinity*'s memorable album cover.**

PRESS/AARON MASON

of emotion were uncouth. As someone who was very sensitive, I think I was like, 'How do I express this?' Music was something where you could be as emotive as you want to be, and it was accepted by family and by society. It was like a loophole, and music became more than a product for me."

Townsend started writing songs on his own as a young man, with that early start being met with early attention. After he started sending some of his solo music (then made under the pseudonym Noisescapes) to record labels, he got signed to Relativity: the home of Steve Vai. When Vai needed a vocalist for *Sex & Religion*, it didn't take long for Townsend's name to enter the conversation, nor for the Canadian to get the job.

Townsend was 19 when he first joined the guitarist and started living every teenager's rock'n'roll dreams: he was thrust from the wilderness of the Great White North to performances on *The Tonight Show* and arena tours with Aerosmith. However, in this world of music-making infinitely more commercialised than rural Canada, Townsend grew more and more furious, seeing how cynically bigwigs treated the medium that gave him emotional catharsis.

"When I moved to Los Angeles and joined Steve Vai's band, it was with a type of turbo naïvety," Townsend explains. "I became so angry when I realised that this thing I held so sacred was nothing more than this commodity. From that point, I was like, 'I want to use whatever musical talent I have just to make things explode.' Then, Strapping!"

Strapping Young Lad's 1995 debut, *Heavy As A Really Heavy Thing*, saw Townsend channel his frustrations through music, the one coping mechanism he'd ever known. It didn't work. During the making of the band's second album, *City*, released in 1997, he was still enraged, but was also using psychedelic drugs. Within the next year, by *Infinity*, "all of my experiences had time to gestate into an identity". Townsend — confused, angry, on substances and unsure how to handle the ways he was feeling — began to view himself as the classic media trope of the tortured yet genius artist ahead of his time.

"I ended up going down this avenue of thinking that I knew it all," he remembers, "and that it was my responsibility to tell everybody in my life what they were doing wrong. If I was smarter, it could have ended up being something like trying to start a cult. But fortunately, I'm a dumbass, so everybody was like, 'Oh, fuck you, man!'"

"When I moved to Los Angeles and joined Steve Vai's band, it was with a type of turbo naïvety. I became so angry when I realised that this thing I held so sacred was nothing more than this commodity."

Townsend also grew cynical himself — not with music, but with human beings. He began to believe that the people in his life weren't truly interested in him and were instead using the musician for some kind of material gain.

"Best friends of mine that were around for years, I was paranoid and told them that they're only in my life because they want something," he says. "It was just all the stereotypical, paranoid, delusional behaviour that comes with a combination of somebody whose identity had been established [in the public eye] prior and then, all of a sudden, drugs. Documented now with those kinds of psychedelic experiences is a lot of this type of behaviour."

Eventually, friends and family called Townsend out for how he was acting, and the artist was checked into a mental health hospital. It was there that he realised the clichéd role he was playing — and the extent to which he'd been "getting off on it".

"I was like, 'Oh, shit', because I was in this facility with a bunch of people who are chronically schizophrenic and really, severely troubled. I remember thinking, 'Wow, how much of this is me playing an artist?'"

After being discharged, Townsend worked on *Infinity* and many of the album's lyrics ask the question of how one can forgive oneself for their own unjust behaviour. The multi-instrumentalist performed the lead vocals, guitars, bass and keyboards almost entirely by himself, and also acted as producer. Then, once everything was finished and he got to listen back to what he'd just made, he had his reality-restoring revelation.

"I remember listening to it and going, 'Oh, it doesn't sound that great'," he laughs, that humility returning. "The importance I'd put on this thing as being a world-shifting piece of art was pulled away by me going, 'Dev, this is one record out of dozens of records.' I listened to ABBA and *Infinity* side-by-side and it was so clear to me."

Then why release it?

"Because I couldn't have done any better."

It's the sharp learning curve that Townsend went through during *Infinity* that, to him, makes the album worth reissuing 25 years on. However, with that idea came another from his record label: he should recreate the album cover in 2023. The original artwork depicted him naked when he was in mid-20s. He's 51 now.

"When I did it, I was 26 years old and not eating," Townsend reflects with a laugh. "It was part of this 'mission'. I called up my friend, this poor lady, and I was like, 'I have to do this.' So she had to spend a day Photoshopping my dick out of photos. Conversely, this time — when they were like, 'Would you consider doing it again?' — I was like, 'Fuck sake!' Ha ha!"

In posing naked before a camera in middle age, though, Townsend learnt something.

"The thing that I realised, just by being asked [to do it], is that I'm not ashamed of the things I did back then," he says. "I have to honour who I was back then, because I wasn't trying to be an awful person. I was doing my best with what I had at that time.

"It's not that the things I was saying were fundamentally wrong," Townsend concluded, "I just got [how to behave] wrong. Because it was such a humbling experience, *Infinity* stands alone in my catalogue as something of such magnitude."

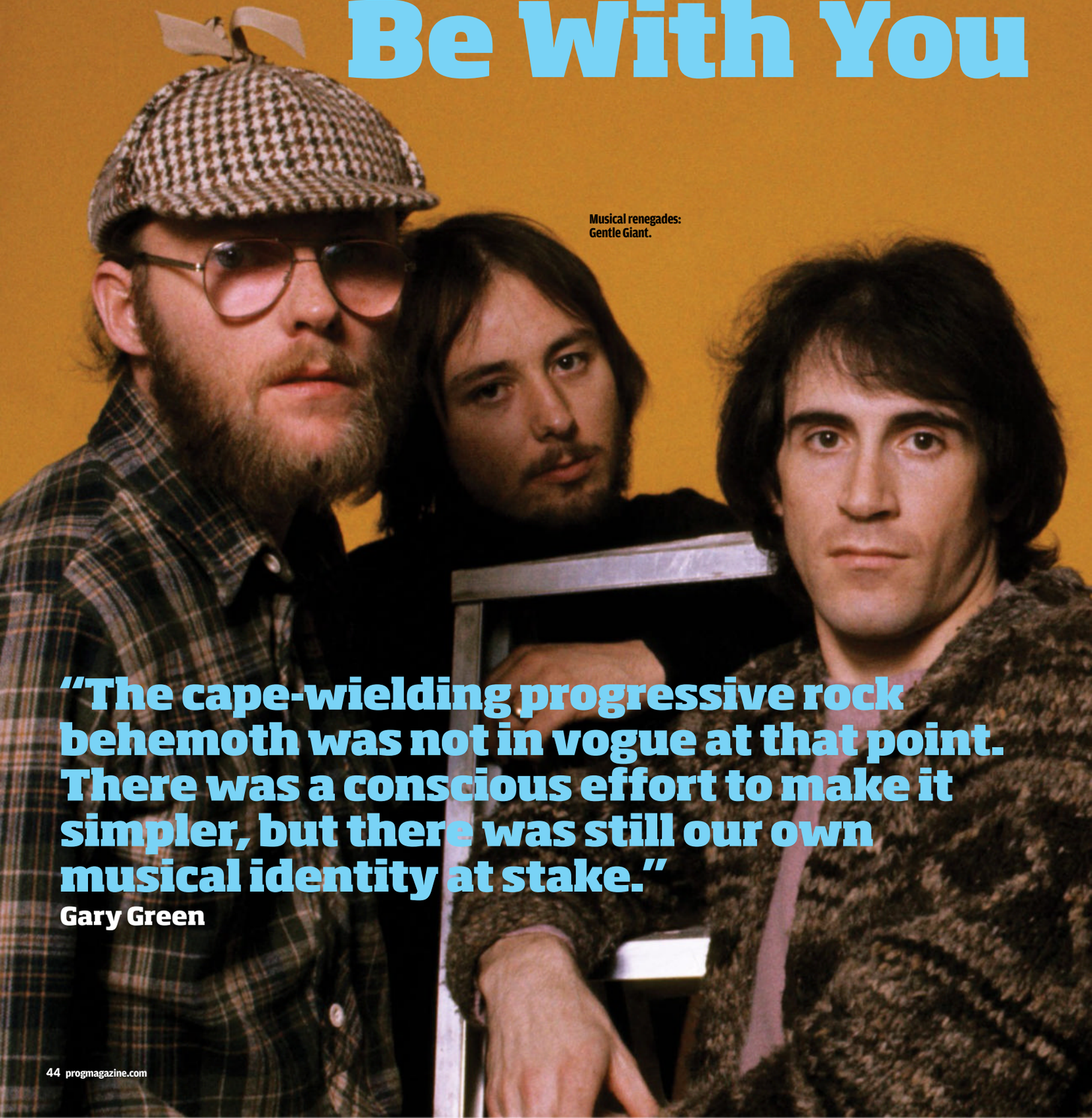
Infinity (25th Anniversary Edition) is out now via InsideOutMusic.
See hevydevy.com for more information.

He hides nowhere: 26-year-old Dev, meet 51-year-old Dev.

PRESS/AARON MASON

HevyDevy is a humbled prog mastermind.

Piece Be With You



Musical renegades: Gentle Giant.

"The cape-wielding progressive rock behemoth was not in vogue at that point. There was a conscious effort to make it simpler, but there was still our own musical identity at stake."

Gary Green

For many, it was **Gentle Giant**'s last truly great record, but *The Missing Piece* came out at a challenging time for progressive rock and didn't get the recognition it perhaps deserved. Forty-seven years on, the band's ninth album has been refreshed and reissued, much to the joy of old and new fans alike. Guitarist Gary Green, drummer John Weathers and keyboard player Kerry Minnear take *Prog* on a time jump back to the original record's creation and reveal how it got its cryptic title.

Words: Dom Lawson **Images:** Richard E. Aaron/Redferns/Getty Images

In 1977, progressive rock entered a very peculiar year. Although still a great commercial force, circumstances were nudging the genre gently towards obsolescence, as the mainstream gaze was redirected elsewhere. For Gentle Giant, a band with unassailable cult status and a loudly proclaimed disregard for convention, changing tastes presented a significant challenge. Recorded at Relight Studios in Hilvarenbeek, the Netherlands, the Portsmouth pioneers' ninth album was probably destined to clash horribly with everything around it. A diverse and fractious affair, it was, for some, the sound of a band hedging their bets. For others, it was the last truly great album that they would ever make.

Newly remixed by Steven Wilson, *The Missing Piece* has resurfaced in 2024: ripe for reassessment and considerably more fascinating than truculent cynics would have us believe. *Prog* spoke with GG guitarist Gary Green, keyboard player Kerry Minnear and drummer John Weathers, to discover whether this notoriously controversial record was a radical, underrated gem or a confused mess. The answer seems to be a bit of both.

"Yeah, well, punk had hit, hadn't it?" says Green. "I think that threw everyone into a bit of a whirlwind. It did us, for a bit. It's hard to remember how we felt at the time. All albums are products of who you are at the time, and if you weren't there, with an understanding of those circumstances, it's hard to translate that. But that's a roundabout excuse for saying that we didn't know what the hell we were doing!"

The notion that punk rock destroyed prog is, in essence, an absolute nonsense, and yet the realisation that Gentle Giant were dabbling in such simplistic waters was more than enough to incite howls of betrayal from many fans at the time. *The Missing Piece* is not, by any stretch, a punk or new wave album, but songs like *Two Weeks In Spain* and, in particular, *Betcha Thought We Couldn't Do It*, certainly provided a little smoke, if not actual fire.

"It was interesting, wasn't it?" grins Minnear. "Because I think it was Ray [Shulman, Gentle Giant's bassist, who died in 2023] who got into punk quite early. I think there was something about punk that appealed to him. It had raw energy and it didn't need to have really accomplished playing to communicate,

and that's really quite a precious thing in itself. We knew the kind of history we had, and in a way it was a kind of a straitjacket because we felt we needed to be clever or a bit unpredictable, so there may have been a slight rebellion going on."

"Well, we weren't quite prepared, were we?" adds Green. "Suddenly we were confronted with this popularity wave that was going on, and it was nothing like what we did. I think we felt that we'd had the rug tugged from under our feet a bit. It was a wake-up call, for sure."

Originally released in August 1977, *The Missing Piece* was Gentle Giant's ninth album in seven years. From their self-titled debut in 1970 onwards, the band had pursued what was then a fairly standard course of action. Every year, they would write and record a batch of new material, and then hit the road to promote it. Despite never achieving the commercial success enjoyed by Genesis or Pink Floyd, they were still a well-respected force in the prog fraternity. More importantly, they seldom had the time to sit around pondering what their next move would be. As a result, the recording of *The Missing Piece* was simply the next chapter in an ongoing story.

"We were on a path. We had a routine, if you like," says Green. "We'd make an album and then go tour it. You'd have a bit of time off, you'd think about making another album and then it would be the contractual time to have an album ready. It wasn't a treadmill, but that was our routine. That was how we saw our lives to be. Then suddenly, this thing happened and we weren't quite the darlings anymore. Not that we were ever anybody's darlings, but even less so at that point."

Famed for writing songs that were meticulously arranged and unashamedly complex, Gentle Giant were not prone to relying on spontaneity or jarring changes of focus. Isolated from the rest of the scene down in Portsmouth, they had thrived on their own eccentric insularity. This time, however, several new tunes seemed to at least be peering inquisitively at the world beyond the studio door.

"Yeah. It's funny, isn't it?" Minnear says with a shrug. "Me and Ray used to share ideas after a couple of weeks. We'd have a two-week break, and then come up with some ideas and get together with Derek [Shulman, GG frontman], and in the early days Phil [Shulman, saxophonist on the first four albums] as well, and see what was going to be usable and what direction to take it. Some of the songs were quite simple on this album, and they didn't need an awful lot — they were more or less presented as complete songs."

"It seems like there was a conscious move to simplify a little bit at that point, given the influences coming from all around," says Green. "The cape-wielding progressive rock behemoth was not in vogue at that point. There was a conscious effort to make it simpler, but there was still our own musical identity at stake."

Its reputation may suggest that Gentle Giant were veering off on some perverse tangent, but in reality *The Missing Piece* was still abundantly stocked with music that bore the band's unique and well-established stamp. On its second side in particular, the blissful, acoustic *Memories Of Old Days* and the tooth-rattling wonkiness of *Winning* were as true to the prog spirit as anything in their catalogue. Nonetheless, the album contained enough surprises to set off a few alarms.

"Yeah, *Memories Of Old Days* represents our musical identity, that tune, or that half of the album at least," Green muses. "There was some sort of knee-jerk reaction in *The Missing Piece*, I think. Maybe we could've done a better job of sewing it all together to hide the seams, but it's a product of who we were, and our confused thinking at the time."

"We *had* taken half of it on tour," interjects John Weathers. "We'd taken *Winning*, *Memories Of Old Days*, *For Nobody* and *As Old As You're Young* on tour before we recorded them. So we just whipped right through them in the studio."

"We'd done the regular Gentle Giant stuff and tested it," agrees Green. "We played it out, but then something else happened!"

"Divine intervention!" roars the drummer. Cue much laughter from all three.

In truth, there was something about *The Missing Piece*'s scattershot approach that fitted perfectly with its creators' idiosyncratic way of doing things. From the soulful *Mountain Time* (which Green notes is the only song the band wrote that grew from a rehearsal jam) to the Genesis-like *I'm Turning Around* ("What I had in mind then was that we needed a single!" says

GENTLE GIANT ARCHIVES/CHRYSALIS PRESS/RICHARD E AARON

Minnear, slightly sheepishly), these were hardly overt departures from the prog norm. Listening to the album's new incarnation today, it may be hard to wonder what all the fuss was about.

"*I'm Turning Around* was the missing piece, in fact!" beams Green. "That's why the album was called what it was, because it was all in search of that elusive hit. I think we even went to Hilvarenbeek because we'd hoped that some of Genesis's success would rub off on us, in the newly laid floors of Relight Studios [where Phil Collins and co had recorded *Wind & Wuthering* a year earlier]. We decided to make it all sound punchier, put loads of top-end on it and forget about the bass... and that's why this new remix sounds very good! [laughs] We're very happy with it, by the way."

Having entrusted Steven Wilson to remix several other albums from their canon, Gentle Giant approached revisiting *The Missing Piece* secure in the knowledge that their 1977 opus was in the safest of hands. In fact, Wilson seems to have retouched the record to the point where Green, Minnear and Weathers are much more satisfied than they had been at the time.

"Yeah, the clarity and the stereo positioning of stuff, the character of the sounds is all lovely and sharp and clear," says Minnear. "Bless him, he did a good job!"

"Not taking anything away from Mr Wilson," says Green, "but it could only have come out [sounding] better than the original! He had a good palette to start with there, in that it could only be improved. But I would just like to thank Steven for not putting on the phasing on the voices in *For Nobody* because I never liked it! I don't know if he intentionally left it off, but whatever, it's alright now!"

Forty-seven years on from its original release, *The Missing Piece* may never quite attract the same degree of adoration as certified classics like *Octopus* and *The Power And The Glory*. But even as prog started to slowly circle the plughole, at least in terms of its cultural clout, Gentle Giant were still very much in love with the music they were making. A few bad reviews, which Green notes they can barely remember at this point, can't dent the memory of a job well done.

"We had a sense that it was a good record, but then I don't think we ever had that sense immediately after finishing an album," he says. "We may have had a moment of euphoria when the final mixes were done and you have the big playback of the album, with the lights turned down in the studio, at huge volume, and it sounds great. Then you come away and you think, 'Urgh...' [Laughs] But I think we'd made a good album, absolutely. We never *didn't* think that."

"Yeah, I enjoyed it," says Minnear. "I enjoyed being where we were!"

"I don't think you really get hurt by bad reviews," says Weathers. "The worst one we had was the first time we did an American tour, and we got a review that said, 'This is the worst band I've ever heard in my life! They're a bunch of musical renegades, and the very worst of them is the drummer!' [Laughs]"

The Missing Piece may not be regarded as a stone cold classic, but neither is it their *Love Beach*. At a time when prog bands were beginning to flail hopelessly around, unnerved by the safety pins being jammed into modern music's face, Portsmouth's finest had found a way to break their own rules without hurling baby after bathwater.

"We were just a bit flummoxed as to what was going on," admits Green. "We just weren't built like that, that's not who we were, so any attempt we had to crossover was going to fall foul. The shoes we had just weren't the right fit, and we were stumbling over the cobbles."

"Sandals in a storm!" bellows Weathers.

"Yeah, that's about right," Green nods. "We weren't dressed for the weather, that's the truth of it."

"We knew the kind of history we had, and in a way it was a kind of a straitjacket because we felt we needed to be clever or a bit unpredictable, so there may have been a slight rebellion going on."

Kerry Minnear

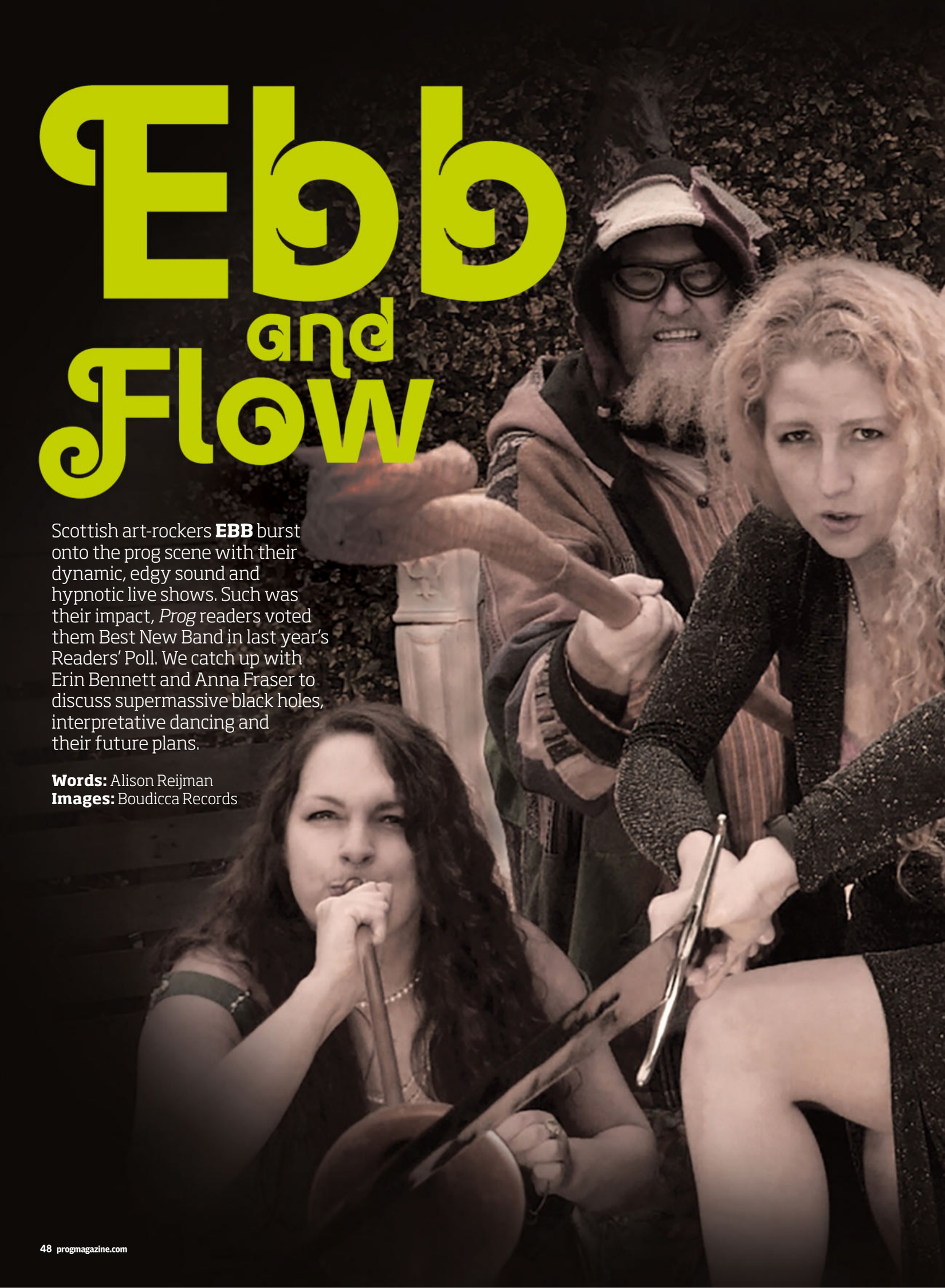
Left to right: *The Missing Piece* album cover; press ad for 1977 US tour; Capitol Records promo card and Chrysalis promo card, both from 1977 for the release of the album and the accompanying tour.

The Missing Piece is out now via Chrysalis. See gentlegiantmusic.com for more information.

Ebb and Flow

Scottish art-rockers **EBB** burst onto the prog scene with their dynamic, edgy sound and hypnotic live shows. Such was their impact, *Prog* readers voted them Best New Band in last year's Readers' Poll. We catch up with Erin Bennett and Anna Fraser to discuss supermassive black holes, interpretative dancing and their future plans.

Words: Alison Reijman
Images: Boudicca Records



From a chance meeting in a café in Alabama to gracing the best prog stages here in the UK, EBB are determined to be different.

"Kitty is someone who interprets the music through her physical being. We tease her and tell her she's as mad as a box of frogs. But she's our resident frog!"

Erin Bennett

There were celebrations in Scotland when art-rock collective EBB heard they had picked up the *Prog* Readers' Poll's Best New Band award. Speaking from EBB HQ near Dumfries, Erin Bennett and Anna Fraser are still buzzing from this very unexpected accolade.

"We're really very surprised. We put it out on social media and said: 'Hey, the Readers' Poll is out: vote for us.' But never did we expect to get the email which said, 'You've won!'" enthuses Bennett, the band's vocalist, guitarist and composer.

Their debut album, *Mad & Killing Time*, coupled with live appearances at three notable festivals — Fusion, Summer's End and Prog The Forest — sealed their reputation for bringing a unique, show-stopping gritty dynamism and individuality to the prog party. But it was a one-in-a-million meeting back in 2005 that originally brought them together. EBB's producer-bassist Bad Dog (Finn McGregor) managed a band touring the USA. It included backing vocalist/percussionist Kitty Biscuits, multi-instrumentalist Nikki Francis and synth player/backing vocalist Suna Dasi.

Bennett explains: "I'm originally from Texas, but I ran into them when I was cooking in a greasy spoon café in Dothan, Alabama that's in the buckle of the Bible belt. Their bus broke down on the way to Florida. Nine British women walked into that café with their very different aesthetic and accents — and they all played music. I was in love. I grabbed hold of their legs and never let go! That was serendipity, if you ask me."

Two weeks later, she joined that band, MT-TV, as a sound engineer and tech, going on the road with them for two years before moving to the UK in 2008. There, she started a band called Syren that included her wife, drummer Jo Heeley, who died of breast cancer in 2012.

Drummer Fraser, who comes from the Shetland Islands, signed up in 2013. "My schoolteacher managed to get a drum kit and since then I've been obsessed," she explains. "I was quite a hyper child, so the drums calmed me down as I could put all my crazy energy into that. I did a music course at Edinburgh's Napier University when the guys were looking for a female drummer. I met them and started jamming with them. The rest, as they say, is history."

The collective gathered around Bennett as she recovered from the loss of Heeley, culminating in EBB's first official release, the EP *Death & The Maiden*, in August 2019. The prolonged lockdowns that followed enabled them to finally make their full-length debut, *Mad & Killing Time*, which came out in November 2022. The companion EP, *The Management Of Consequences*, which was released at the beginning of this year, expands on *Mad & Killing Time*'s themes.

"I guess you get this a lot in prog, where an overarching concept sits on top of an album, or a few songs with other concepts within it so that it's almost like a spider's web," says Bennett. "The album was about two people we knew; it was like taking a snapshot from their lives, describing the human experience in and out of romance, and personal difficulties.

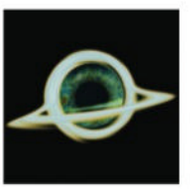
"When we started writing the songs for this EP, we realised so many people struggle with issues like this. They are not necessarily unique."

The mighty EBB, L-R: Bad Dog, Erin Bennett, Nikki Francis, Anna Fraser, Suna Dasi, Kitty Biscuits.

The EP is dedicated to Sagittarius A*, a supermassive black hole at the centre of the Milky Way, the scale of which, say the band, puts any human suffering into perspective.

"I think it was Finn who came up with the phrase, 'Sagittarius A* renders our experience terminally irrelevant.' I had never heard it put more beautifully than that," explains Bennett. "That fact for me is what encapsulates this EP. Ultimately, it is a dark reminder to live your best life.

"We looked at the fact that the human condition is one where we get so wrapped up in our daily things, we forget that there is this quite nihilistic perspective that you can take. Ultimately, it reminds us we need to be more light-hearted about stuff and stop taking things quite so seriously."



***The Management Of Consequences*: inspired by a supermassive black hole.**

> "We were bracing ourselves for some kind of reaction like second-album syndrome, expecting some rough reviews, but so far, it's all been very positive."
>
> **Anna Fraser**

Opener *Silent Saviour*'s three movements begin with a sunrise and ends with a reel.

Bennett explains, "You've got this spaced-out atmospheric start where the synths swell, and the sax comes in. This movement, *The Awakening*, reminds me of a sunrise. The second movement, *The Work*, is the meat of the song. It represents a snapshot of a person's day. This is when you look at yourself and realise the things you would like to change – perhaps how you interact with other people and yourself. The epic end of it is what we call *Reeling In The Pub* and is about having a good time. All the stuff you worried about earlier doesn't really occur to you, so it does not make any difference now. You are still alive! It's all a bit highfalutin', but we had fun doing it."

Fraser continues, "Nikki and I were responsible for the end section. She wrote this excellent jig and we wondered how we should use it, so we put it in as the final part of this song."

Cost And Consequence is now a proven live-show crowd-pleaser that hits extraordinary heights through Biscuits' anguished cry mid-song.

Bennett recalls, "The Ukrainian war broke out as we were writing it. We thought it was a good metaphor for the experience of war, both individually with a single person and collectively with a culture. I don't know how Kitty came up with it. There wasn't a dry eye in the rehearsal room when she first did it. It almost renders the rest of the song irrelevant because it captures both the pains and the joys that come out of a nation at war."

Closer *Nieu* is particularly personal to Bennett.

"It's me when I was going through some personal hefty stuff. It almost felt like there were about 800 versions of me inside my head. Each had a different opinion and all of them were talking at the same time. I said, 'OK, I need to figure out who I am among all this noise.' I imagined it almost as a weird, fatalistic bloodbath. I locked them in a room together and let them beat the hell out of each other until there was only one left standing, and that was my take on it."

She laughs: "But with that black hole in the background about to swallow you up, it wouldn't matter anyway!"

The reviews have been very favourable so far.

"It is so crazy," Fraser says of the response to the album. "We were bracing ourselves for some kind of reaction like second-album syndrome, expecting some rough reviews, but so far, it's all been very positive."

There are a string of live dates lined up throughout 2024, for which the band are planning new elements. These will happen on top of Biscuits' highly interpretive dancing.

"She's the only one who rehearses her moves," says Fraser. "She is a wickedly good dancer, but she is also into tai chi, so she's always very physically involved."

"Kitty is someone who interprets the music through her physical being," Bennett says. "We tease her and tell her she's as mad as a box of frogs. But she's our resident frog!"

The extra elements for the live shows include visuals and a new occasional addition to team EBB.

"Nikki's working tirelessly editing video footage to go behind us onstage," explains Bennett. "She is an incredible graphic designer, and she has created some amazing stuff. An actor will also join us onstage for our longer sets. It will add more of a showy element as she will compère and narrate the concepts behind the show.

"Lending our focus to the live aspect is all part of being in a band," she concludes. "Songs often happen when they happen, and beyond the shows, I think a new album will wind up writing itself."

The Management Of Consequences is out now via Boudicca Records. See ebbband.com for more information.

EBB cooking up a storm in the kitchen – and, later this year, on stages across the UK.

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"*Close To The Edge* was one of those records [we listened to as teenagers]. And *Crime Of The Century* and *In The Court Of The Crimson King*. There was some Pink Floyd and some Santana too – we used to cover Santana tunes early on."
Guy Garvey

High Time

They've been around since the late 90s, but **Elbow** have come of (prog) age on their 10th album, *Audio Vertigo*. Guy Garvey and Craig Potter map their evolution from a bunch of rock fans with lofty musical ambitions to award-winning, chart-topping art-rockers whose fans include Peter Gabriel.

Words: Grant Moon **Image:** Peter Neill

Prog fans? Elbow? They wear their prog armbands with pride.

By the time Guy Garvey joined his guitarist mate Mark Potter's band, Mr Soft, in 1990, his music-savvy sister, Becky, had already ensured the 16-year-old was schooled in the good stuff — from Genesis's *Selling England By The Pound* onwards.

"I have a deep love of prog rock," says Garvey, who turned 50 in March. "Mark liked more meat-and-potatoes rock back then, AC/DC in particular. He'd come around to my mum's house, we'd sit in the kitchen and write songs on a guitar. Then one day — I'm still flattered by it — he said, 'I get my wage this weekend. Can we go into town and will you buy me a record collection?'"

That Saturday the pair trooped around Manchester's Corn Exchange and Afflecks Palace, sifting what gold they could from the markets' second-hand music shops.

"*Close To The Edge* was one of those records," the singer recalls, "and *Crime Of The Century* and *In The Court Of The Crimson King*. There was some Pink Floyd and some Santana, too — we used to cover Santana tunes early on.

"Starting out, we sounded just like what we were: a bunch of lads who have only had a few hours of playing together. Then straight away we were writing songs with three movements in them: 'This will be the fast bit, then it'll break down and come back to the first bit!' And of course, it was all awful, for fucking years... But it was ambitious."

Mr Soft would go on to refine their songwriting process and wisely rechristen themselves Elbow later in the 90s. Their stunning 2001 debut album, *Asleep In The Back*, was part-recorded at Real World, where the band met and struck up a friendship with the gaffer, Peter Gabriel. He would go on to record a beautiful orchestral cover of their tune *Mirrorball*; they returned the favour with a moving read of his *Mercy Street*.

From Gabriel down, a wealth of progressive artists and prog fans alike have a lot of time for Elbow. They get and respect the artistry of what they do: the controlled intensity of *Any Day Now*; the hooky intrigue of *Leaders Of The Free World*; the blues DNA of *Grounds For Divorce*'s sinewy central riff. Their soundworld has a cinematic dimension, their

musical arrangements are lean, purposeful, subtly intricate. In husky, proudly Mancunian tones, Garvey offers distinctive, fresh melodies and sensitive, earthy lyrics of rare poetic power. It's all there on their 10th album.

Audio Vertigo might be their most upbeat and unusual record yet. In January the band performed lead single *Lovers' Leap* on the UK's biggest TV chat show, *The Graham Norton Show*. The tune's busy, wonky hook was mimed by glamorous trumpeters, but in fact it's Garvey blowing through a dusty old Melodica and keyboardist/producer Craig Potter doubling that with a Mellotron trumpet, a dash of distortion glueing the two together.

Second single *Balu* ('*You were the B of the bang of the binge/Till I split for a tryst with a rust belt girl with a Plantagenet fringe*') has an uncharacteristically bold 80s synth hook over Pete Turner's busy crunchy bass, another horn motif thrown in for good measure. Featuring a rare, wah-wah'd Mark Potter guitar solo, languid and spacious rocker *Things I've Been Telling Myself For Years* is part middle-age reckoning ('*I'm the dashboard hula girl of nodding self-deception*') and part parodic confessional of a rock star ('*I haven't paid for cabs or beers or met a cunt in 20 years*'). Wiry, fuzzy indie rocker *Good Blood Mexico City* harks back to the time the band played with Foo Fighters at Mexico's huge festival, Corona Capital 2017. Breezy, major-key *From The River* is Elbow at their sunniest and closes an album that is, in sum, a lot of fun. That's something this occasionally dour lot decided to have more of this time.

"Craig and Pete floated the idea of us having more fun," Garvey says. "I thought, 'Yeah, OK — I like fun!' The last album [2021's *Flying Dream 1*] had been recorded with the band separated. We're massively proud of it, but we knew it would get largely ignored because of the bottleneck of artists all releasing material after lockdown. Then, suddenly, we're allowed to be together again, in a room, jamming it out and having fun, enjoying each other's company. There's a general confidence to this record. We know that if we want to write fun, up, energetic stuff we can't labour it for hours like the subtler stuff. You've got to go in, commit to something and then get out."

Craig Potter agrees. "The words 'fun' and 'energy' kept cropping up. We've had quite a broad mix of dynamics on an album in the past. We'd almost treat them like a setlist, where you've got your quieter moments, your big energies, your singalongs. But this time we wanted the energy to be there pretty much all the time. We're used to working with certain sounds and you do fall into certain patterns, so I'd experiment as I went along, not using my usual plug-ins [music software] but finding something else that does a similar job but with a slightly different feel. We kept binning stuff that sounded too much like Elbow, and then we'd just move on to the next thing. We were quite strict with it. Ten albums in, it's got to feel different, you know?"

Since 2005's *Leaders Of The Free World*, Elbow have regularly recorded in the large, airy 'Big Room' at Salford's Blueprint Studios, but this time they opted for different places, including Migration Studios in the Cotswolds. Another factor in this fresh energy is Alex Reeves, their superb, newish drummer. Original incumbent Richard Jupp left the group in 2016, and Reeves has worked with them on every album since the following year's *Little Fictions*, but *Audio Vertigo* marks the first time he's been involved from the inception and writing of the record.

His work on *Lovers' Leap* is gutsy and subtly inventive, the intro's cowbell and verses' syncopated snare offering plenty for those wont to finger-drum to the fiddly rhythmic bits at gigs. Using a modern jazz/hip-hop technique, Reeves gives an intoxicated swing to the short and sordid *Poker Face*, a song skewering youthful excesses ('*Cokey chokey one for the road/It's so Soho Hotel...*'). The song *Knife Fight* has a verse with more than a little Genesis to it and a gang-chanted outro ('*Hallelujah buy us a pint!*') that could be 70s Yes on

"Guy sounds a bit like Peter Gabriel anyway. But if you start double-tracking him it goes full Peter. That felt like something we'd not done before, but musically it was right from the start."
Craig Potter

ATHENA CARAMITSOS

Elbow, L-R: Guy Garvey, Craig Potter, Pete Turner, Mark Potter, Alex Reeves.

PETER NEILL

The band channel their inner Elvis '68 Comeback Special style.

a Saturday night bender. A bonus reference to the Chandrasekhar limit — the maximum stable mass of a white dwarf star — caters to that vital astrophysicist demographic.

When Mark Potter was writing the song, Reeves gave him the drumbeat and then, says Garvey, the guitarist was away.

"Al was here from the ground floor on this one, and you can hear it. With everybody interacting creatively he would say things to different members who perhaps haven't been encouraged in a certain direction for a couple of decades. And I'd think, 'Oh, I forget to do that!' In the same way as any new person coming into any group dynamic, it freshens the connections."

As implied by his own lyricism, the singer prefers poetry to novels — "Chewy words you can sit with and savour; a series of events leaves me cold." So it's Seamus Heaney, Simon Armitage, Carol Ann Duffy and his current favourite, Brit-nominated rapper Little Simz. With its title lifted from Wordsworth, *Very Heaven* is slinky and groovy, a tale of being 17, finding yourself, dropping out of school and meeting your 'tribe' — in Garvey's case, his band.

"When you're improvising vocals, whatever pops out is already in your heart, in your mind somewhere. For me there's a lot of Catholic doctrine in there, and 80s advertising jingles."

And nowhere on *Audio Vertigo*, or perhaps the entire Elbow catalogue, is the Peter Gabriel chromosome more evident than on *Her To The Earth*. With its *So*-era keys and groove, the lead vocal double-tracked, and melody drawn from a more unusual minor key, at times the similarities are uncanny.

"Obviously Guy sounds a bit like Peter Gabriel anyway," says Craig Potter, "but if you start double-tracking him, it goes full Peter. That felt like something we'd not done before, but musically it was right from the start."

"I spent a long time finding [melody and words] for that," adds Garvey. "I did it through 'mee-mor' — just making sounds with my mouth — then I'd double-track it and that would be slightly more coherent, then I'd re-record the original and it would get one step more coherent still, then I started finding the meaning in the sounds in the words. I know it's a way that Peter works, we've discussed it. And also, even though I wasn't to meet him for 20 years after I started singing, he taught me to sing."

But for all these credentials, it's probably a reach to rebrand Elbow from top-tier indie rock band to bona-fide prog band, and Potter knows it.

"A lot of people who have heard of Elbow would wonder why we're in *Prog* magazine! For people who've heard our albums, there is a lot of proggy stuff on there, like *Newborn* from our very first album; *Fly Boy Blue* and *This Blue World* [both from 2014's UK No.1 LP, *The Take Off And Landing Of Everything*]. But in the UK your taxi driver may have heard us, but probably only the singles."

Chief among those, *One Day Like This* remains their most famous and accessible tune (108 million Spotify hits and counting). The one cabbies and grannies know, it was the jewel on 2008's Mercury Prize-winning, triple-platinum LP, *The Seldom Seen Kid*. That broad-base anthem was developed specifically for radio then, to help push the band after their move from previous label V2 to Fiction Records. It's always felt like something of an anomaly in their catalogue, even more so in the light of *Audio Vertigo* (which sister Becky Garvey loves, by the way). It's bound to be in the encore when the group head off on their 12-date UK arena tour in May.

"I can't believe we're still allowed to do it," says Garvey. "It's a small amount of great-big rooms, and the challenges of that keep you awake — holding that many people for that amount of time. I know from experience we'll all be vibrating with fear until the moment we step onto the stage, and then we'll be like, 'Oh yeah!' Safety in numbers. I'm not on my own up there. Part of it is showing off for your mates, and part of it is this amazing ritual that you get to be a part of. It's not lost on me."

It'll be, well, fun.

New album, *Audio Vertigo*, is out now.

Audio Vertigo is out now via Polydor. See elbow.co.uk for more information.

"This album has been about letting the song dictate when it needs something, and when it doesn't, and letting my ears be my guide."

The Division Bell

Her last three albums have blended her love of fusion, prog and metal, but with *Division World* **Jane Getter** has redefined her songwriting with her Premonition band. On her fourth LP, zigzagging instrumental turns and elongated solos remain, but only when needed. This time around, Getter tells us she let her ears, rather than her indulgences, write what has proved to be a far more convincing blending of the musical worlds she loves so dearly.

Words: Phil Weller **Images:** Linda Heath

Jane Getter is a jazz guitarist at heart. For the New Yorker, who's been playing guitar since she was eight years old, that means long, winding compositions rich with improvised solos come as second nature. Yet, on her latest album with her Premonition band, Getter has gone against her own intuition. She's stripped her songs of everything but the bare necessities.

"My ability to edit songs is something that has developed over the years," she reflects. "Sometimes, especially earlier on, I would start writing a song and then I think, 'Oh, I really want to put this in' just because I thought it would be cool. And so I put it in. Listening back, I feel that certain elements weren't necessary."

Outside Premonition, Getter has had a varied career as a supporting cast member. From the party jazz of Brother Jack McDuff to her proggy meanders with Trifecta keyboardist Adam Holzman, she's built a wealth of experience. With Premonition, however, it's always been about what she likes and, if she likes it, she'll find a place for it in her music. While that stylistic free-for-all remains prevalent on her latest album, *Division World*, it's become more laser-focused, where every second of the record is warranted; vital.

"This album has been about letting the song dictate when it needs something, and when it doesn't, and letting my ears be my guide," she ascertains. "If I have a really long extended instrumental section, I've been asking myself, 'Does that get the point of the song across or not?' Sometimes it's OK the way it is, it doesn't need extra sections. Those conversations were really important."

Getter's fusion background may tempt her to close her eyes and play, but at the fourth time of asking, her head has outfoxed her heart. Everything has its place and no section overstays its welcome. For that, Porcupine Tree can take a little credit.

"I love Steven Wilson's writing. I love his songs, his melodies and chord choices," she says with a big smile. "And then so often they go into heavy sections, which are really fun. But it's always part of a meaningful song, which is what I like the most. That was a big inspiration."

Lyrically, the story of the record is encapsulated in its title. It speaks of a divided world where the true essence of who we are as humans is fading.

"I feel that there's a lot of personal conflict throughout the album," says Getter. "Some of the songs have to do with world conflict, how divided we are and how messed up the world is right now. Then there's personal conflict, being confused or going through something that you just want to stop.

"In the chorus of *Division World*, the lyrics are, '*Division world is not us*': this is not how we are as humans. I'm reflecting on all the selfishness and greed that exists in the world, and questioning what drives that."

The title track opens the record with perpetual tension. Sure, it's gone on a long walk on the bridge, yet, never at any point does the tension properly, satisfactorily resolve. For someone who sees herself as a guitarist first, and vocalist second, it says what she perhaps struggled to say in words.

"I was talking with [American-Canadian singer-songwriter] Ani DiFranco the other day, and a lot of her songs are political," Getter tells us. "She was telling me that her message is always 'Let's try to make the world a better place.' For my songs, it's more a case of saying how I'm feeling about something and my reaction to it. I'm not trying to change the world with my lyrics, but maybe it helps people realise they're not the only ones that feel like that."

Contrastingly, the record ends with *Waiting For The Light*, which is led by acoustic guitars, strings, flutes and a decidedly more hopeful demeanour. However, it isn't always sunshine and rainbows. She co-wrote the lyrics with her friend and poet, E Amato — "So, as you can hear, there are a lot more verses and it's just got a different vibe" — and refrains from giving the album a perfect resolve.

"The protagonist is still waiting for the world to be beautiful again," the musician says of the song that features the smooth and charming vocals of hardworking progger Randy McStine. The pair's duet gives the record a wonderfully beautiful yet bittersweet conclusion.

"With that song, I felt like I couldn't really do a great job on it with my vocal ability alone. I've worked with Randy before, he's toured with us and he sang on my last album, so I knew he'd be great on the song. I wanted a Peter Gabriel kind of vibe on there and

L-R: Paul Frazier, Alex Skolnick, Jane Getter, Gene Lake, Adam Holzman.

he brought that to life. I like the contrast that a male and female voice brings, I think it brings freshness to the album."

Once more, her band include the triple-threat of keyboardist, co-producer and husband Adam Holzman, alongside Testament's jazz-loving guitarist, Alex Skolnick. Holzman's experience working with prog and jazz legends in Steven Wilson and Miles Davies, and Skolnick's ability to play heavy metal and high-brow jazz with veritable ease, make them vital components in actualising Getter's sonic vision.

"Some of the songs have to do with world conflict, how divided we are and how messed up the world is right now. Then there's personal conflict, being confused or going through something that you just want to stop."

"Alex has been playing with me since the first Jane Getter Premonition album [2015's *On*]," she says of her co-guitarist. "He's always been the perfect guy because he can play anything I ask him to. I always wanted to have a real authentic metal thing happening with the music, alongside the jazz and I have that with him. When we trade solos together onstage it's always so much fun. He's got such a great vibe."

The band are completed by a new rhythm section. Esteemed and versatile bassist Paul Frazier (St Vincent, Chaka Khan) is joined by drummer Gene Lake (Marcus Miller, Screaming Headless Torsos), who guested on 2021's *Anomalia*. Now, he's joined the fold full-time, and they're two musicians Getter is keen to keep around for as long as possible.

"Paul is someone that I worked with years ago, and I loved playing with him," she recalls. "Then he started playing with David Byrne [Talking Heads] and he was never available again. During the pandemic, that all of a sudden changed and now I don't want him to go anywhere!

"Paul and Gene know each other from playing with Nile Rogers and Chic, too. There's a certain level of comfort when you play with someone for a long time, you can immediately get into the zone, there's not a big adjustment period and I feel I have that with this band."

Bred from familiarity and comfort is trust. Getter is eager to reiterate that these are her songs, but she relies upon her bandmates to turn her sketches into pieces of art.

"When I write," she explains, "I write all the keyboards, bass parts and drum grooves. But when we get into rehearsal together, I want everyone to do their thing. Adam might have suggestions for chord voicings, because I'm not a keyboard player, and Gene really brings in that human element to my programmed drums. It's more a sense of showing them what I'm hearing but being open to their suggestions and changes. Once the music is played by real people, we can hear how it's piecing together."

Getter is guided by her ears. If you are too, check out *Division World*!

All these factors have conspired to result in what Jane Getter, without batting an eyelid, calls the premier Premonition record.

"Every album I've done, I've evolved as a composer," she underlines. "I really loved how *Anomalia* came out, but this album takes it much further. I'm sorry for the cliché, but I really think it's my strongest album yet!"

Division World is out now via Esoteric. See janegetter.com for more information.

NEW RELEASES FROM THANATOSIS

Rotem Geffen
The Night is the Night *(LP/CD/DL)*
Second album from Swedish pianist, vocalist and songwriter Rotem Geffen. The lyrics, written in German, English, and Hebrew, delve into memory, love, sorrow, and the poetics of the night. On the album, she collaborated with Alex Zethson (Vathres) and co-producer and mixing engineer Anton Toorell (Dammit I'm Mad, Inwader Ace). The result is an album with varied and dynamic instrumentation, where the songs are imbued with a naïve shimmer that is balanced by darkness, depth, and subtle intensity – in both lyrics and music.

Angles & Elle-Kari w. Strings
The Death of Kalypso *(2LP/CD/DL)*
Haunting tunes interwoven with improvisational sections and acoustic drone, all performed by a stellar 12-piece ensemble plus inimitable vocalist Elle-Kari (The Tiny). For fans of Beth Gibbons, Carla Bley, Henry Purcell ... Available on CD and double gatefold vinyl. ***Out 26/4.***

STHLM svaga
Plays Carter, Plays Mitchell, Plays Shepp *(CD/DL)*
The quietly playing jazz septet performs new works by Ron Carter, Roscoe Mitchell and Archie Shepp respectively, written especially for the ensemble. Recorded at legendary Atlantis Studios in Stockholm and mixed to analogue tape, the album boasts an ethereal and incredibly intimate sound. ***Out 17/5.***

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Swept Away

The creative engines behind Fates Warning switch gears as they shapeshift into **North Sea Echoes**. Ray Alder talks about the excitement of reconnecting with Jim Matheos, the joy of singing quietly, and the torture of writing lyrics for *Really Good Terrible Things*.

Words: David West **Images:** Jeremy Saffer

Last year, Fates Warning frontman Ray Alder let slip in an interview with *Prog* that guitarist Jim Matheos, his bandmate for over 35 years, had neither any plans nor the desire to write new music for the progressive metal pioneers. It appeared that a creative partnership spanning four decades had reached the end of the road. Then along comes North Sea Echoes, a new project reuniting the pair while exchanging the heavy riffing of Fates Warning for acoustic guitars, electronic percussion and ambient spaces on their immersive debut *Really Good Terrible Things*.

"It was all Jim's idea," says Alder today. "Jim contacted me out of the blue and said that he was working on some music."

Matheos was writing for Tuesday The Sky, the name under which he released 2021's *The Blurred Horizon* and 2017's *Drift*. However, the music led Matheos in unexpected directions, away from the predominantly instrumental approach of Tuesday The Sky.

"He said he keeps hearing vocals and wondered if I'd be interested in trying it out, seeing if it worked," says Alder. "He sent me a few songs, and I picked *Open Book*, the opening track on the album. That one just seemed to grab me. The music was beautiful. I said, 'It's going to be hard to sing over this, to be honest with you.' I didn't want to ruin it."

> "The music was **beautiful**. I said, 'It's going to be **hard to sing** over this, to be honest with you.' I didn't want to **ruin** it."

After four days working on lyrics and a melody, Alder sent the song back to Matheos with his vocals and the chemistry between the longtime collaborators ignited once more.

"At that moment we knew that we were on to something," he says.

It was even more surprising because on Fates Warning's 2020 album, *Long Day Good Night*, the band signed off with *The Last Song*. "So I just assumed we would never work together writing again," says Alder.

The undulating soundscapes of North Sea Echoes feel like they exist worlds away from Fates Warning or Alder's solo albums, 2019's *What The Water Wants* and 2023's *II*. However, Alder had considered making an album on the quieter side for some time.

"I need the right musicians to make it happen," he says. "There's also the fact that I don't know if anyone would give a shit because it's quiet music and a solo album. There's already a lack of interest in solo albums anyway, so who knows what that would have been like."

Consequently, when he heard

Northmen: Ray Alder (left) and Jim Matheos.

what Matheos was working on, serendipity smiled at the singer.

"This was the perfect opportunity and being able to work with Jim again was great," he says. "I didn't really see that in the future for us. He said he didn't want to write any more Fates Warning music, so I jumped at the chance to work with him. It was cool reconnecting, especially after the pandemic. I hadn't seen anyone in the band for three years, so it was great to work together again."

As they sent files and ideas back and forth, with Alder in Spain and Matheos in the US, the question arose of what to call this newborn entity.

"We threw a bunch of names around. One of them was from a song on the album called *No Maps*," says Alder. "I said, 'Why don't we call it Sin Mapas, in Spanish?' We were going with Sin Mapas and Jim told his wife or his daughter, 'What do you think of "Sin Mapas"?' They said, 'Sid Papas? Sounds like an Italian restaurant!' So that went out the window."

For the briefest of moments, they were tempted to take the easiest but surely most controversial option.

"I was kidding around with Jim, 'It's you and me, why don't we just call it Fates Warning?' He's like, 'Hmm,' for about five seconds, then we're both like, 'No, there's no way, it would just piss everybody in the world off.'"

Both men make a habit of keeping notes on their phones whenever they see or hear something that might provide the starting point for a song or lyric. And so they dug through their archives.

"Jim had 'North Sea Echoes' written down," says Alder. "It just seemed to fit the music, the solitude, the vastness of it all."

North Sea Echoes' first album, *Really Good Terrible Things*.

The Fates Warning men dive into a new sea.

Thus, armed with an album and a banner under which to march, they faced their next challenge: how to release the music.

"We were a fair bit into the music at that point and the conversation came up: what the fuck are we going to do with this?" says Alder. "Do we look for a label? Put it out ourselves? Will people be interested? There were so many questions and a bit of self-doubt — is anyone going to care? We're not tech-savvy. We looked into releasing it on our own and said, 'Fuck this.' So we said, 'We're going to look for a label.' We had a few ideas, contacted a few people, had a few 'No's.'"

Their thoughts turned to Metal Blade, home to not only Fates Warning, but Matheos's projects OSI, Kings Of Mercia and the most recent Tuesday The Sky album. However, despite their relationship with the label, they weren't sure what sort of reception to expect for something so far from prog metal.

"We didn't want to go to Metal Blade because it is so different," says Alder, "and we didn't know if they would even be interested."

But there was a familiarity and connection that quickly assuaged any doubts. "I consider them family. We've been with them for so long, so many years, that I know everybody in the office that has ever worked there," says Alder. "Whenever we see each other, it's like old times. I miss them. I used to see them all the time when I lived in LA, I was always in the office. [Brian] Slagel and I were good friends and we always hung out, and the president of the record company is Joey Vera's wife, our bass player from Fates Warning, so again we're all just family."

Really Good Terrible Things allows Alder to express different influences, including his love for Iceland's post-rockers Sigur Rós and Australia's Hollow Coves. Plus there was the chance to showcase his voice in a completely different musical context to the metal he's been known for throughout his career.

"To have the opportunity to just sing quietly and not yell and scream all the time was really great," he enthuses. "Most of this album is in four, but there in the back if you really count there are some guitars going on that are weird, they're in seven or something. There are some odd times but it's hard to pull them out. It was great not having to count everything."

Add in the benefit of being able to work in his home studio in Spain and the recording process was a decidedly chilled experience.

"It was nice to have a cup of coffee and start singing," he says. "I really looked forward to waking up, walking into the studio and starting to record. It was a pleasure. Also, not having to go

"Jim said he didn't want to write any more Fates Warning music, so **I jumped** at the chance to work with him. It was **cool reconnecting**, especially after the pandemic. I hadn't seen anyone in the band for **three years**, so it was great to work together again."

to a studio and work with an engineer and have that sterile environment… The comfort of your own home seems to make a difference."

The mood of the album is introspective and sombre, qualities found in Fates Warning's music, despite the very different sonic backdrops that surround Alder's voice. The song *Throwing Stones* concerns cherophobia — the fear of happiness.

"To think there are people in the world who are afraid that if they're happy something bad will happen, it blows me away," says Alder.

However, the vocalist has never been enamoured of the challenge of finding the right words to put to Matheos's music. "Writing lyrics is the hardest thing in the world to me, I can't stand doing it," he says. "I second-guess myself. I wonder, 'Do people understand it? Is it too vague?' It just becomes torture."

He may not want to be vague, but equally Alder doesn't want to spoon-feed his intention to listeners.

"I'm always asked, 'What does this song mean?' It's not the point, man!" he says. "If you watch a movie and don't understand it, are you going to go online and see what it means? 'Oh, OK, that's what it means,' when you may have thought it means something else? That's how it is for lyrics with me. That's another thing; when I'm writing a song I have to think, 'Fuck, are they going to come back and ask me what this really means?'"

After 10 studio albums with Fates Warning, plus his solo records and work with A-Z and Redemption, Alder says that lyric-writing hasn't become any easier despite all the practice.

"If anything, it's less," he explains. "I don't think I cared so much before. When I first began writing, it was more just trying to make words rhyme and fit syllable-wise. It wasn't that long ago, honestly. But the more I write now on my solo albums and everything else, it's not that I'm running out of ideas, but I'm afraid that I'm going to step into the same subject that I have before. So, I'm running out of subjects, I guess. If you're a pop band you can sing about love and you're totally fine. I tend to want to write about things that are going on and emotions other than love. There's more to life than that. I mean, it's a great thing, but there's more going on."

Even the album's title, *Really Good Terrible Things*, suggests a certain rainy-day perspective on the world, although that's not how Alder feels about the music.

"I've already heard from some people, 'It's so sad,'" he says. "I don't think it's sad. It's introspective, ambient, thought-provoking."

Alder says that he and Matheos haven't discussed playing live as North Sea Echoes, but never say never.

"I got into music to play live. To me, writing is a necessary evil to get out on the road," he says. "I don't know how possible it would be. We'd have to hire a band and the way things are now, who knows? Everything is so expensive, it's even hard for Fates to go on the road now.

"I'd love to. I'm sure one day in the future we will discuss it. Obviously, it comes down to how well the album does, too."

In the meantime, Alder just wants to continue doing what he loves.

"Jim and I went into this with no expectations, we were just enjoying working together, writing music again," he says. "The life goal is just to be happy and keep working on music. That's what makes me happy, as long as I'm doing that, I'll be OK."

Really Good Terrible Things is out now via Metal Blade. See northseaechoes.com for more information.

Hold onto your pants, **Midas Fall** are back, sounding bigger and heavier than ever. The making of *Cold Waves Divide Us* is a tale of stalking Buddhist monks online, something called a Bottom Master, frightening audience members, and, um, misery prog. Colour us intrigued! We caught up with the trio to find out more.

Words: David West
Images: Stephen Alexander

MISERY LOVES COMPANY

“[Our music] is a hard thing to describe and misery prog, for those in the prog-know, is the best I can come up with.”

Rowan Burns

Midas Fall: they’ll blow your knickers off!

“I don’t think we went into it planning to make a heavier album,” says vocalist, producer, and multi-instrumentalist Elizabeth Heaton about *Cold Waves Divide Us*, the fifth album from Midas Fall. Since 2018’s *Evaporate*, the Scottish proggy post-rockers have expanded into a trio, with touring bassist Michael Hamilton joining Heaton and guitarist Rowan Burns. The sound may be heavier and more expansive than ever, but the writing process that produced their current record stretches back to *Evaporate*.

“There wasn’t really a gap in the writing. We carried on, it’s just taken a long time,” says Heaton. “I don’t write because I need to make an album. I write because it’s an emotional outlet. That’s been the case since album number one, and I think that will always be the case. That’s always how I’ve dealt with any issues in life: just put it into the music, then I can walk away from that and be happy. Just channel it all into the music.”

Despite the melancholic and introspective character of Midas Fall’s music, there’s joy and healing behind the creativity.

“I don’t think anything quite beats the therapy that music offers me,” says Heaton. “Both writing and performing live give a very similar feeling. That moment when you’re writing and you think, ‘Ah, this is something good’ and it’s causing an emotional response in me, that’s when I know I’ve written something that I want to put out.”

He may be the new guy, but Michael Hamilton more than pulls his weight.

“He writes a lot of electronic music himself so he’s a jack of all trades,” says Heaton. “When it comes to helping with the songwriting, you can send him a track and he’ll put in synth lines and electronic drums or put in the bass or an extra guitar part. And because he gets the music, it has really added in a positive way, having an extra set of ears.”

Hamilton’s participation is just one factor feeding into the mightier sound of their new record. A shopping spree helped, too.

“We bought a lot of new baritone guitars,” says Heaton, “Michael moved to playing a five-string, so we were naturally playing bigger, chunkier, heavier chords. I was playing around a lot with different drum sounds, and I think for the first time, we’ve been able to produce an album that’s as big as we are live.”

One recent addition to guitarist Rowan Burns’s arsenal has been the suggestively named Fender Bottom Master.

“I’ve been listening to a lot of [US post-rock artist] Emma Ruth Rundle between *Evaporate* and this album and I was like, ‘What the fuck does she play? How is she getting that sound?’” says Burns. “I saw that one of her guitars is a Jaguar Baritone, which I really struggled to find.”

The guitarist discovered that alongside the model created for the western market, Fender made one exclusively for Japan.

“Rather than call it a Baritone Custom, they called it the Bottom Master,” she says, grinning. “It was quite a mission to get hold of. I had been stalking a Buddhist monk from the San Francisco Bay for years on Twitter [X],

“I think for the first time, we’ve been able to produce an album that is as big as we are live.”

Elizabeth Heaton

just casually like, ‘Are you selling that yet?’ Eventually he was like, ‘Yeah, OK.’ It had been sitting untouched for 10 years. Now I have this whole new range of sounds and tunings to mess around with. It was a new sense of freedom, all these other ways of playing that were really interesting. I had a bit of a lull and hadn’t been playing as much as I would normally, and this opened that back up again.”

The album release is being supported with a five-show run in Germany in April, followed by Portals Festival in London in May.

“We certainly prefer playing in Europe, just because the culture of touring over there is generally nicer than in the UK,” says Heaton.

Burns concurs, adding, “There’s a very different culture around how people view live music. They seem to be more up for it when you go to mainland Europe, whereas here, when I was living in cities and seeing friends, ‘Do you want to go and see this gig tonight?’ ‘Oh, I don’t know.’ There was one gig I wanted to go to, and a friend of mine was like, ‘No, I need to get back, I want to watch *Big Brother*.’ Fuck off!”

Burns suggests that perhaps the answer is a tour of remote Scottish islands in the middle of winter, “when there’s fuck-all happening”, as she says. “I know you guys are gearing up to start chucking potatoes at each other, however, let’s change up Friday night this week with a bit of misery prog.”

Wait a minute — misery prog?

“I’m in a building that’s falling to bits, I’m constantly trying to push it back up like a shit Atlas,” says Burns. “When I have trades [people] come in, they see the guitars, ‘Oh, do you play music?’ ‘Uh huh.’ ‘Do you play in a band?’ ‘Uh huh.’ ‘What kind of music do you play?’ Oh God, this question! When I say prog, people are like, ‘What’s prog?’ ‘Pink Floyd.’ I don’t think there’s much of a comparison you can draw between what we do and Pink Floyd, so if they did listen to it, they would be sorely disappointed if they thought they were going to get something like Pink Floyd. It’s a hard thing to describe and misery prog, for those in the prog-know, is the best I can come up with.”

Whatever you call their music, *Cold Waves Divide Us* marks the first time the band have captured their live sound.

“For years now, people have been coming to our shows and going, ‘You guys are so much heavier live than you are on record,’” says Heaton. “That’s because they’re comparing us to *Evaporate*, which is essentially an album we recorded in a bedroom with no real drums.”

“There are definitely bits when we’re recording where it’s like, ‘That’s going to sound fucking huge live!’” says Burns. “The end of *I Am Wrong*, I was like, ‘Yeah, that’s so heavy now, that’s going to blow your fucking knickers off!’ You’re into it, it’s unfolding and it’s huge, you can’t wait to do this in a live environment when it sounds as big as it sounds now. But there’s absolutely no foresight that goes into it.”

However, the intensity of the live shows has produced unexpected responses, as Burns discovered in Glasgow last December.

“A guy came up to me at the end, we were packing down, and said, ‘That was really frightening.’ That’s a new one,” says the guitarist. “I was like, ‘Frightening? Really?’ ‘Yeah. I was quite unsettled by it.’ I don’t know what to do with that, I don’t know how to respond to somebody saying your set was frightening and they were unsettled by it.”

So, what hopes do the band have for *Cold Waves Divide Us*, besides terrifying an unsuspecting public?

“It would be nice to get a bigger tour together for this album. I find the question of what we want to get out of it a difficult one to answer because it’s not really up to us,” says Burns. “Creating expectations, like I want it to be massive and I want to have it on the radio, is naïve and unrealistic. You set yourself up for that and you’re going to be massively disappointed. But if what you want is for people to enjoy it and get something out of it, that’s the most meaningful thing you can have for anything you put out there, for it to mean something to somebody.”

Cold Waves Divide Us is out now via Monotreme. See www.midasfall.com for more information.

L-R: ‘new guy’ Michael Hamilton, Elizabeth Heaton, Rowan Burns.

ICE AGE

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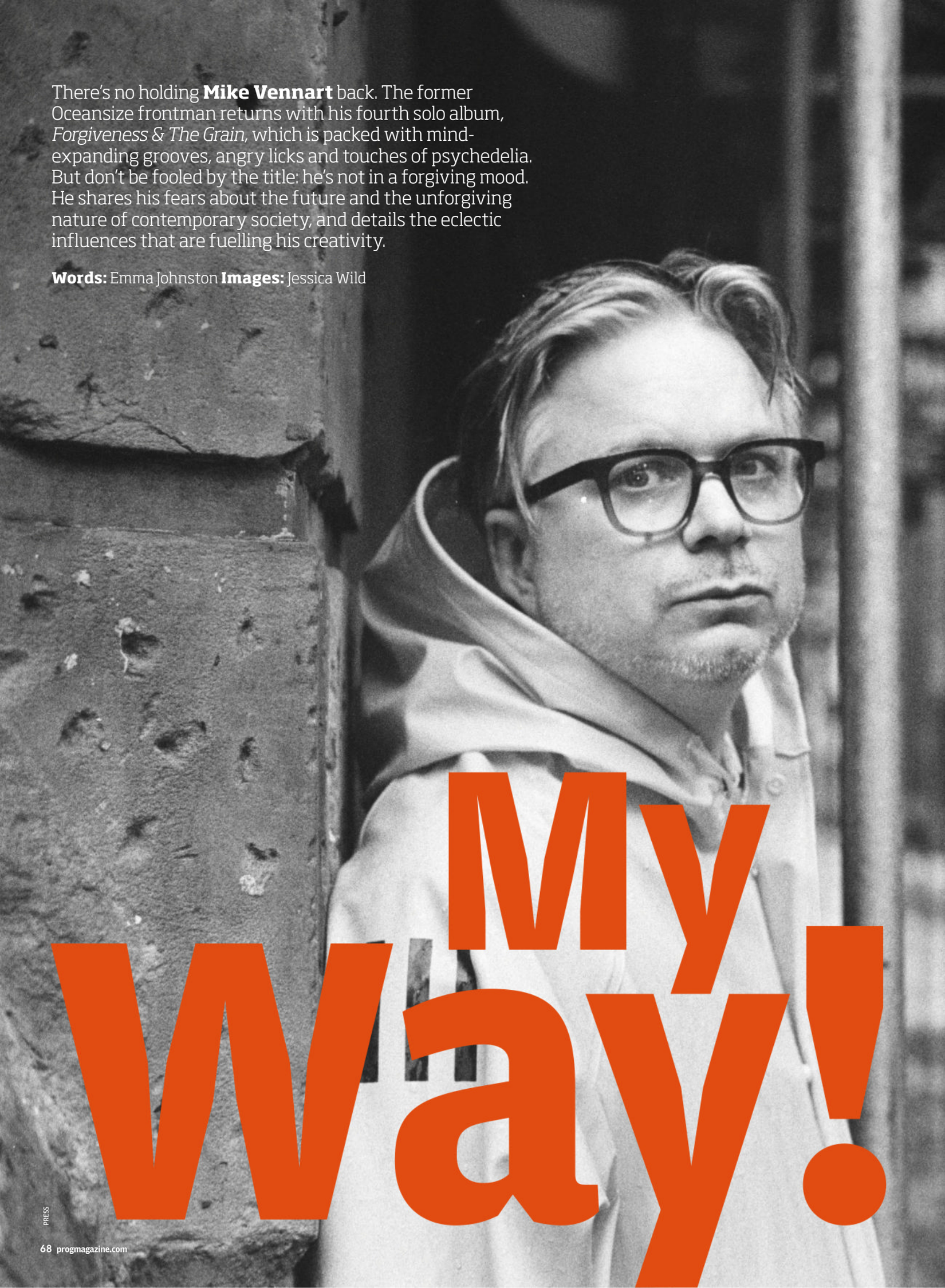
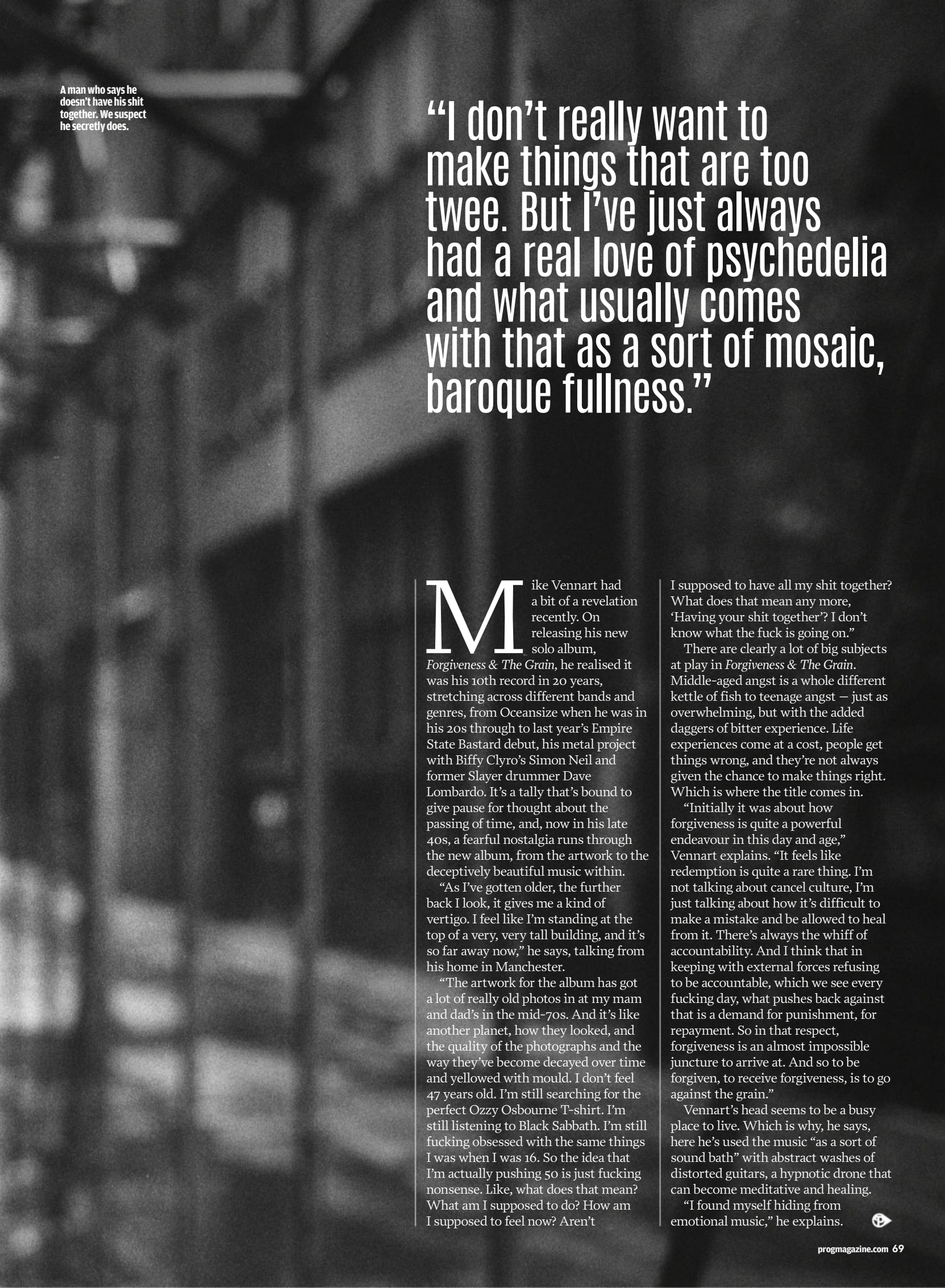


My Way!

There's no holding **Mike Vennart** back. The former Oceansize frontman returns with his fourth solo album, *Forgiveness & The Grain*, which is packed with mind-expanding grooves, angry licks and touches of psychedelia. But don't be fooled by the title: he's not in a forgiving mood. He shares his fears about the future and the unforgiving nature of contemporary society, and details the eclectic influences that are fuelling his creativity.

Words: Emma Johnston **Images:** Jessica Wild

PRESS



A man who says he doesn't have his shit together. We suspect he secretly does.

"I don't really want to make things that are too twee. But I've just always had a real love of psychedelia and what usually comes with that as a sort of mosaic, baroque fullness."

Mike Vennart had a bit of a revelation recently. On releasing his new solo album, *Forgiveness & The Grain*, he realised it was his 10th record in 20 years, stretching across different bands and genres, from Oceansize when he was in his 20s through to last year's Empire State Bastard debut, his metal project with Biffy Clyro's Simon Neil and former Slayer drummer Dave Lombardo. It's a tally that's bound to give pause for thought about the passing of time, and, now in his late 40s, a fearful nostalgia runs through the new album, from the artwork to the deceptively beautiful music within.

"As I've gotten older, the further back I look, it gives me a kind of vertigo. I feel like I'm standing at the top of a very, very tall building, and it's so far away now," he says, talking from his home in Manchester.

"The artwork for the album has got a lot of really old photos in at my mam and dad's in the mid-70s. And it's like another planet, how they looked, and the quality of the photographs and the way they've become decayed over time and yellowed with mould. I don't feel 47 years old. I'm still searching for the perfect Ozzy Osbourne T-shirt. I'm still listening to Black Sabbath. I'm still fucking obsessed with the same things I was when I was 16. So the idea that I'm actually pushing 50 is just fucking nonsense. Like, what does that mean? What am I supposed to do? How am I supposed to feel now? Aren't I supposed to have all my shit together? What does that mean any more, 'Having your shit together'? I don't know what the fuck is going on."

There are clearly a lot of big subjects at play in *Forgiveness & The Grain*. Middle-aged angst is a whole different kettle of fish to teenage angst — just as overwhelming, but with the added daggers of bitter experience. Life experiences come at a cost, people get things wrong, and they're not always given the chance to make things right. Which is where the title comes in.

"Initially it was about how forgiveness is quite a powerful endeavour in this day and age," Vennart explains. "It feels like redemption is quite a rare thing. I'm not talking about cancel culture, I'm just talking about how it's difficult to make a mistake and be allowed to heal from it. There's always the whiff of accountability. And I think that in keeping with external forces refusing to be accountable, which we see every fucking day, what pushes back against that is a demand for punishment, for repayment. So in that respect, forgiveness is an almost impossible juncture to arrive at. And so to be forgiven, to receive forgiveness, is to go against the grain."

Vennart's head seems to be a busy place to live. Which is why, he says, here he's used the music "as a sort of sound bath" with abstract washes of distorted guitars, a hypnotic drone that can become meditative and healing.

"I found myself hiding from emotional music," he explains.

"I was just listening to neutral harmony, music that is either perfect fifths, perfect fourths, things that don't have perfect thirds, minor thirds or major thirds in it so there's no specific emotional quality to it, so I can just be in a neutral, meditative frame of mind to try and shut off the fucking noise of absolutely everything else."

Coming straight off the back of ESB's metal filth, there's a real beauty and elegance to these songs. It's eclectic stuff. He sites Swans as an influence on *Seventy Six* ("It's this hypnotic, fucking black hole that just takes you somewhere else"). *Casino*, with shades of early Verve or Earth, was intended "to be opening up a big fucking starry, sparkly, smoky room". At one end of the spectrum, *Fractal* amps up the distortion to crazed levels, while at the other, the pretty *RU The Future??* was inspired by Lana Del Rey and Phoebe Bridgers. "*3 Syllables* is probably as prog as it gets, though," Vennart adds. "That riff at the end is pretty fucking crazy. It's my hemiola trick, which I've used countless times on various things.

"I don't really want to make things that are too twee," he continues. "But I've just always had a real love of psychedelia and what usually comes with that as a sort of mosaic, baroque fullness. It's not meant to be showy, it's meant to be psychedelic in that sort of dark way that The Cure have, where things are quite flowery and involved. It's like ASMR."

Joe Lazarus is back again on drums, and Richard 'Gambler' Ingram adds the odd flourish on piano — he and Vennart have been working together for 32 years now, since the start of Oceansize. But mainly this is a very solitary record, just Vennart alone in his spare room, blasting out layers of noise on his guitar, tapping into the darkness and claustrophobia of the modern world. Musical beauty meets the beast of anxiety.

"Some people think it's my most optimistic record," he says, with surprise. "I don't hear that at all. It's a sombre, nostalgic record. The first two solo albums that I made had a much more substantial air of optimism and a comfort to them. This is not a comfortable album to me, because I don't feel like a comfortable person any more.

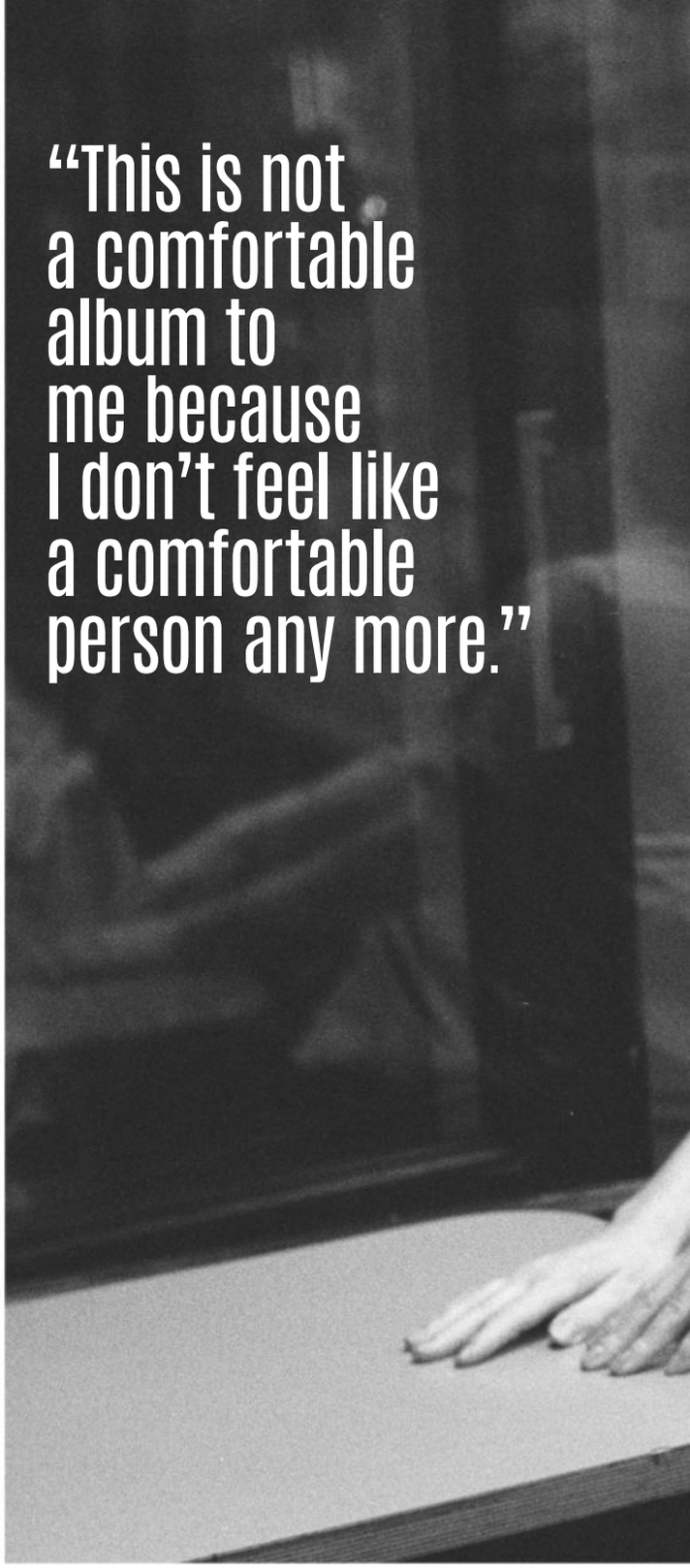
"I'm just questioning absolutely everything. At no point do I feel that there's a future that's worth looking forward to. I feel fucking incredibly scared and fearful of whatever might come next in my life and on the global stage. There's a lot of references in this record about just crying at the feet of passers-by and recognising that at any point any one of us is minutes away from being made homeless. Who's got that level of security any more? Your rent goes up, your bills go up, food's more expensive. How secure is it possible to be? None of this is going to change anytime soon, because the government are absolute fucking psychopaths, and the primary candidates in the opposition are about as effective as a cat flap in an elephant house. The Labour Party are an absolute disgrace, they're an alternative to absolutely fuck all. They've got four years to sort this out when they get in power. And when they fuck it up, the Tories will be back as Tory-plus, Tory fucking cubed. It'll be [Nigel] Farage in, and [Suella] Braverman. It's not going to fucking go away."

Ah, yes. Politics. Social justice. Standing up for what is right. These aren't subjects Vennart has ever shied away from. Keeping his opinions to himself is the coward's way out, and he's admirably forthright in his beliefs and morals. Which is why he ended up the subject of an ugly right-wing pile-on when he was videoed calling convicted criminal and far-right activist Tommy Robinson (real name Stephen Yaxley-Lennon) a Nazi when he spotted him in the street five years ago. Since then Vennart has been the target of online threats of physical violence and a campaign of intimidation from nameless, faceless keyboard warriors who took umbrage with his comments.

"I will never back down," he says. "If somebody wants me to apologise to that guy for shouting 'Nazi' at him on the street, OK, but I know why I did it. And I meant it. That guy is a shit-stirrer. He showed up to Manchester days after the fucking Manchester bomb, which killed 22, and he starts talking about how the people on this street are enemy combatants who want to maim and kill you. I used to live on that fucking street. It was the most peaceful place I've ever lived in my life. I've been calling that shit out for years. Where I'm from, when I lived there, it was a hotbed of racism. I'm gonna call it out. It's OK to sit behind your fucking computer keyboard and talk shit all day, but he was right in front of me. Fuck him."

Vennart's morals extend to the way he runs his creative endeavours. He won't, for example, entertain the idea of making any of his music available on Spotify.

"I disagree with their funding of AI weapons, I disagree with their platforming of the likes of Alex Jones [far-right radio show host and conspiracy theorist]," he says. "I disagree with the streaming culture at large, but I understand it and I respect it. Spotify would be great for if you're craving a live profile, maybe you wanted to sell some concert tickets. I'm not playing any gigs. I have no plans to play any gigs. So I just don't want to be in that kind of company, man. And I don't have to be."



Vennart isn't afraid to call out injustice when he sees it.

He has, however, found a sense of freedom in Patreon. Not only does the crowdfunding platform give him a direct line to the people who love his music, it also means there's no time limit on when he can send them new songs. Had a flurry of inspiration that day? He can have new music in their inbox within the hour.

So while the new album may feel as though it appeared from nowhere to the outside world, with very little fanfare, he'd been drip-feeding the songs to his followers for the past couple of years, making them part of

the process. It is a taste of true independence.

"I really love it," he says. "Apart from the obvious financial implications, I write a lot of stuff, and as soon as I finish something, I can let people hear it and get immediate feedback. And I really enjoy that because there's nothing more frustrating than only taking a big dump every four years and going, 'There, I've done the record.' It's like micro-dosing, every couple of days I get to release something and people generally like it. Don't get me wrong: being signed to a major label's great, everything gets done on your behalf. And I've certainly never been in the position where I've had to sign to a label where there's some prick telling me to write more choruses. But now I just make the stuff and then put it out."

For all the weighty subject matter on *Forgiveness & The Grain*, Vennart remains good company. Thoughtful, bullish, blunt, funny and Olympic-level sweary, he has a very northern sense of humour. There's also a lot to be positive about. The recent ESB tour was "fucking incredible, really life-affirming stuff. There were certain points where we hit a certain gear where I really just felt like I was levitating and really felt that I was truly in the greatest band of all time." That band are about to hit the road in the US supporting Sleep Token. And, never one to let things slide, he's already writing new material for ESB, British Theatre (his electronic rock project with Gambler) and the next Vennart record. Life may be uncertain and scary, but it's also inspiring, and Vennart is wringing every creative drop out of it: "I feel like within the three bands — my band, British Theatre and ESB — I can get a lot done, I can do virtually anything I want."

And you can bet he'll be doing it all on his own terms.

New album, *Forgiveness & The Grain*.

Forgiveness & The Grain is out now and available from Vennart's website. See vennart.com for more information.

Whatever Happened To The Teenage DREAM?

What's 30 years between friends? Norwegian supergroup **The Chronicles Of Father Robin**, which includes members of Wobbler, Tusmørke, and Jordsjø, have spent the best part of three decades sculpting their debut album, *The Songs & Tales Of Airoea*. The three-part affair was inspired by prog's golden age and, as multi-instrumentalist Andreas Prestmo reveals, there was no better time to share its atmospheric grooves.

Words: Dom Lawson

Fans of progressive rock are perfectly used to bands taking their sweet time. Such is the nature of ambitious, complex and forward-thinking music. But even by normal prog standards, Norwegian supergroup The Chronicles Of Father Robin have really stretched the creative process to startling limits. Founded by three key figures from Norway's contemporary prog scene back in the early 90s, this resolutely old-school project started work on their debut album a staggering 30 years ago. *The Songs & Tales Of Airoea* has had a three-decade gestation, which must be some kind of record. Aided by a star-studded list of contributors, including members of Jordsjø and Tusmørke, vocalist/guitarist Andreas Prestmo, bassist Jon André Nilsen and drummer Henrik Harmer deserve some kind of trophy for seeing their childhood dreams through to the end.

"We were really into Rush at the time! We were teenagers, branching out and finding out about the world, the magic and wonders out there."

"We've actually found the application form for the *Guinness Book Of World Records*, because I think you're right, no one else has taken 30 years!" says Prestmo. "We started it as teenagers, when we were at college. We'd known each other for many years. We grew up listening to a lot of the same things, and it developed into an interest in otherworldly music, as well as art, literature, intellectual ideas, philosophical systems and so on. We were really into Rush at the time! We were teenagers, branching out and finding out about the world, the magic and wonders out there. We started writing songs, and we had all these long conversations. We were always discussing and debating. Eventually we realised that we were creating our own world."

Inspired by the greats of 70s prog and more recent exponents of the form like Änglagård, Anekdoten and Landberk, The Chronicles Of Father Robin began in earnest when the three young men spent a year at one of Norway's 'folk' high schools: cultural and educational centres where students can spend a post-

The Chronicles Of Father Robin are finally ready for their close-up!

This collective certainly know how to spin a good yarn!

"At some point, we figured that we needed to release [our debut album], so that we'll actually be young enough to go around and play it live!"

school gap-year, focusing on artistic and creative pursuits. The trio lived there for a full 12 months, during which the first fruits of their collaboration began to emerge.

"The three of us put our education on hold, and we went to live there for a year," says Prestmo. "We really had the time to unmask all the ideas we had, and to chisel them out to become concepts and songs. We lived and breathed it, 24/7. At that school we met our sound engineer, Eirik Bekkeheien. He invited us to his studio, and we started to record. The first song we recorded was *Twilight Fields*, actually in a garage, and that's the exact recording that appears on the album."

Propelled forward by youthful enthusiasm, Prestmo and his comrades were united in their desire to create a full-blown prog album that would mirror their passion for the wildly imaginative music that had inspired them so much as kids. Little did they know that the record would take so long to complete, but their collective focus seems to have been intense from the start.

"We went back six months later, and we recorded three or four more songs, living in Eirik's house and partying or whatever teenagers do! Then we kept that up until we had recorded the whole catalogue of songs, basically. That took several years. We didn't stress about it, because we knew that it wasn't finished, the story wasn't fully written, and we hadn't talked it all through, but we knew we'd reached a natural stopping point. So we kept on going, and the years just went by! We did the last recordings in 2009, I think, and then we all took a break from it because it was so intense."

As the years progressed, Prestmo, Nilsen and Harmer went off in a variety of directions, forming or joining bands and getting on with the business of living. But the Chronicles buzz was never completely silenced, and continued to occupy their thoughts. As time passed, the trio's plans began to expand, and a host of additional musicians were recruited to bring the band's original ideas fully to life, including Wobbler's keyboard maestro Lars Fredrik Frøislie and Russian vocalist Aleksandra Morozova. Inch by inch, *The Songs & Tales Of Airoea* was being slowly and methodically pieced together. Finally, it was complete.

"We knew we had to get it out there, but parents died, children were born and life happened, you know? At some point, we figured that we needed to release it, so that we'll actually be young enough to go around and play it live! Our engineer Eirik became ill at a crucial moment, so we passed the torch to another friend of ours who has an excellent studio, and he just mixed it all, finishing in December 2022."

The Songs & Tales Of Airoea was finally released in 2023, as a lavish, three-disc vinyl box set. In addition, each record is receiving an individual vinyl release courtesy of Karisma. Limited to 500 copies, the box set has already sold out, much to Prestmo's delight.

"Yeah, we're very happy about that," he says. "This was the plan right from the start, because we grew up delving into *Thick As A Brick*, and all those really nice releases from the 70s, so our goal was always to release it on vinyl, because we think it has more soul and more impact, when you're sitting there with a physical product and you have to take it all in. There's that healthy friction where you need to get up and turn the record over, so you have a physical connection to it. It's not immediate and easy. So that was very important for us."

Physical manifestations aside, *The Songs & Tales Of Airoea* is an extraordinary piece of work. A two-hour old-school extravaganza that flies by in what seems like a fraction of that time, it combines an endearingly odd story about the band's titular hero and his nebulous exploits with songs that draw from myriad old and new school prog sources. From the woozy psych-prog sprawls of *Eleision Forest* and *Twilight Fields*, to the weird and wonderful epic *Orias & The Underwater City,* and the gorgeous, Yes-like *Cloudship*, the Norwegians have, miraculously, produced a mammoth body of work that hangs together beautifully.

"For us it represents our friendship," says Prestmo. "It's quite unique that we started this thing when we were 16, just driven by naïvety and the shared prospect of something happening in the future. There were lots of musicians that were maybe better, or more technically gifted, but the point was always our friendship and the vibe we created together. For me, Father Robin is a symbol of that mindset. You don't give up, you just put things on hold when you need to, or you take your time. Father Robin is an amalgamation. He's a mix of everybody who's involved in the project, which makes him quite schizophrenic! But he's just a vessel, you know?"

Even more impressive than the album itself is the fact that Prestmo, Nilsen and Harmer have remained friends and collaborators for so long. Despite occasional fallings-out and numerous real life distractions, their shared vision has remained solid and true. Now that the record has been released, Prestmo notes that work has already begun on new material, with the project's now expanded line-up also committed to bringing *The Songs & Tales Of Airoea* to life onstage in the near future. Prestmo's grin confirms that its lengthy gestation was very much worth the effort.

"It's a very good feeling when you land on your feet after 30 years and you have the physical copy in hand, and it's like, 'Fuck, we really made it!'" he laughs. "If we hadn't sold out the 500 boxes, we would still be very happy, because we didn't make this to make money or to get famous. It was just because we wanted to do it. We *needed* to do it."

The Songs & Tales Of Airoea is out now via Karisma. See fatherrobin.com for more info.

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Back From The DEAD

After two pandemic-era releases, **Zombi** have finally reconvened in the same room to make the improvisational and dynamic *Direct Inject*. Synth player/bassist Steve Moore and drummer Antony Paterra tell *Prog* how Goblin, Rush and John Carpenter still shape their sound, seven LPs in.

Words: Matt Mills **Images:** Shawn Brackbill

For a lot of bands, coming up with a name is an unceremonious thing. Quite often it boils down to questions as simple as "What sounds cool?" or "What rolls off the tongue well?" Such is not the case with Zombi.

The Pennsylvanian synth-prog duo, made up of Steve Moore (bass/synths) and Anthony Paterra (drums), are named after the Italian title for George A Romero's 1978 horror classic *Dawn Of The Dead*. And not only does it reflect their music's similarity to that of the seminal zombie flick's electro-instrumental Goblin score, there are also personal memories there as well.

"*Dawn Of The Dead* was filmed in Monroeville, Pennsylvania, which is where I grew up," Moore explains on a video-call with *Prog*. "I used to work at the Monroeville Mall and, even when I wasn't working, I'd be hanging out there all the time. I remember, the first time I saw *Dawn Of The Dead*, it blew me away: our mall is in that movie! It's documented, in its prime!"

In their own way (and not just through their collective name), Zombi are carrying on just a little bit of *Dawn Of The Dead*'s legacy. Their synthy, vocal-free, musical meditations would doubtlessly bring a tear to Goblin's eyes, as they carry the same electronic tension and ambience as the Italians brought to 70s horror. Yet Moore and Paterra's new album, *Direct Inject*, is also at alternate points danceable and explorative, as epitomised by a funky title track and *Sessuale II*'s sensual sax, respectively. Even though Zombi state that their latest record has no film-like concept or narrative, it still feels like an emotional journey regardless.

It's a new dawn for Zombi's Steve Moore and Antony Paterra.

"I get it when people think we're soundtracking a film in our heads," says Moore, "but what we're doing is really all about the music."

Direct Inject's title is proof positive of that. Zombi's seventh LP since their 2001 formation, it follows their two pandemic-era projects: *2020* and the mini-album *Liquid Crystal*. Strict lockdown rules means that those prior releases had to be meticulously handled, with more forethought put in as Moore and Paterra traded ideas virtually. This time, however, the band were once again permitted into the same room. Thus they could just plug in and improvise — or, rather, directly inject their cables into amplifiers and see what happens.

"I remember, one day, we were working on one of the songs and Steve said, 'I'm going to do it direct-inject style!'" says Paterra. "It just came from a recording technique. But then, when we got the album art, we saw an image of a humanoid cyborg thing getting hit with some injection of who-knows-what. It all kind of made sense."

It's unsurprising that *Direct Inject* continues Zombi's quasi-cinematic style when Paterra reveals that it was through a film sample that he first met his now-bandmate back in 2000.

"I heard one of Steve's bands playing," he says, "and Steve was playing samples from *Dawn Of The Dead*. At that point in time, I wasn't even aware that you could buy that music. Steve opened me up to a lot of music that I was aware of but hadn't really been able to digest, because I didn't even know it was available!"

"Right around 1999, 2000 and 2001, that was really the first time that a lot of that music was available," explains Moore. "It started getting posted on [early file-sharing sites] Napster and Limewire, and all the Goblin soundtracks started getting released on CD."

Given that the two were in their 20s at the time and had never met before, it's striking how similar their backgrounds were. Both grew up on the outskirts of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which made the locally-filmed *Dawn Of The Dead* pretty essential viewing from an early age. Paterra also found himself

"John Carpenter scores were another thing we bonded over early on. Part of what I wanted to do was bring a John Carpenter vibe into a rock setting."

Steve Moore

awestruck as a young man over the prog/synth/jazz textures of the *Blade Runner* soundtrack by Greek composer Vangelis, though it was the contrast between synthesisers and acoustic drums on 80s Rush albums such as *Grace Under Pressure* that truly inspired him. Moore also fell for that clash of digital and 'harsher'-sounding instruments, pointing to his first time hearing Van Halen synth-rock jam *Jump* as a turning point in his life. *Direct Inject*'s *The Post-Atomic Horror*, where bass guitars strongly rumble against electronic notes, undeniably carry that influence.

"John Carpenter scores were another thing we bonded over early on," Moore adds. "The ideas in those scores, when I hear them, I think they can be so much bigger and do so much more! Part of what I wanted to do was bring a John Carpenter vibe into a rock setting."

Zombi's electronic prog made the right kind of waves almost instantly. By the time of their 2004 debut album *Cosmos*, the band had already signed with Relapse Records, in the process pulling the label away from its typical niche of barrel-chested extreme metal bands. It's a relationship that continues six albums and 20 years later, no doubt strengthened by the critical acclaim and cult success each release has found.

As *Prog*'s time with Moore and Paterra comes to a close, we ask: what's next to achieve? Sure, there's the short-term stuff, like *Direct Inject* and a subsequent North American tour in April, but what's beyond that? What keeps these two going?

"At this point, I'm doing this 50 per cent for myself and my enjoyment, and 50 per cent for the fans," answers Moore. "When you have a band that you really like, it's important to get to see them live. That's such a big part of it."

"As a drummer, just being able to still do it is really special to me," Paterra adds. "We can go out and tour and we're still both into it! It's also a challenge for me as I get older: it keeps me focused and energised."

Moore breaks into a smile and offers a closing shrug. "I don't see there really being any reason to ever stop – as long as people still give a shit!"

Direct Inject is out now via Relapse. See www.facebook.com/zombiband for more information.

THE PROG INTERVIEW

DAVID JACKSON

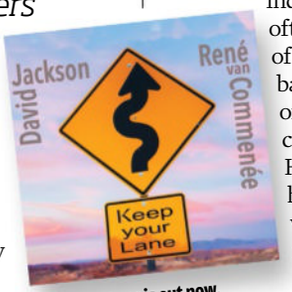
Every month we get inside the mind of one of the biggest names in music. This issue it's **David Jackson**. As Van der Graaf Generator's on/off saxophonist, he played a key role in the band's sound during their heyday on albums that include *Pawn Hearts* and *H To He, Who Am The Only One*. Here, he reminisces about the Six-Bob Tour, hitting No.1 in the Italian charts, the events that led to the creation of 2005's *Present*, and explains why he decided to update *Pioneers Over c* on his latest release with Dutch percussionist René van Commenée.

Words: Julian Marszalek

Even at the height of the first wave of prog rock, Van der Graaf Generator were a breed apart. Driven by Peter Hammill's idiosyncratic songwriting, Hugh Banton's expressive and expansive organ playing and Guy Evans's declamatory drumming, there was darkness emanating from the band that cast a long shadow over the opening overs of the 1970s. And there, in the thick of their attack, was the extraordinary saxophone work of David Jackson. No polite blowing from him, but a brass hurricane that whipped up a sonic storm fed through a phalanx of pedals and effects that largely negated guitars while creating a style of his own.

Jackson and VdGG may not have been without honour except in their own country – they only troubled the UK Top 50 album chart once – but their status in Italy was comparable to Godzilla's rampage across Tokyo with riots following in their wake.

Yet despite their overseas success, punishing schedules, financial mismanagement and domestic indifference lead to VdGG's first split in 1972. And while Hammill ploughed his own individual furrow – often with the help of his erstwhile bandmates – the rest of the band would carry on as The Long Hello. Jackson's health faltered in the wake of VdGG's first reunion and he first retrained as an HGV driver before moving into education and music therapy and then working with VdGG one last time in the 00s. Now reuniting with percussionist René van Commenée on their new album *Keep Your Lane*, he looks back at his career from a vantage point of over 50 years.



Keep Your Lane is out now.

David Jackson and his daughter Dorie team up in Kaprekar's Constant.

PRESS/SEAN KELLY

> I felt at times that VdGG was a bit out of control.

Who or what drew you to the saxophone?

It was my big brother, who was a brilliant clarinettist and then he took up the sax. And it was, "Oh, God! He's got a sax now! What's that?" And because I went to a very traditional English public school, the saxophone had not been accepted yet. When I eventually got one and took it to the school, after a couple of years, they said, "Enough is enough! The saxophone must go home now, David. You are the best flautist in the school. Take that evil thing away!" And my parents said, "The saxophone and the boy are now fused together." So the school said, "We'll keep the boy, but will you tell him to turn it down?" I practised two to four hours every day in school because there was nothing else to do.

What was floating your teenage musical boat?

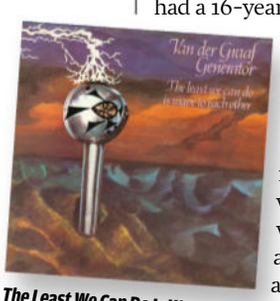
Cannonball Adderley – incredibly good tunes. And then, "Oh, there's a man called John Coltrane who plays play with him. Who's he?" Every time a new name came up, you had to follow that lead. It was like an ever-expanding tree with all these amazing fruits and branches. I was also crazy about Sonny Rollins, especially the story of him going on the Williamsburg Bridge every day for two years to practise.

DAVID JACKSON ARCHIVES

How did you come to join Van der Graaf Generator?
It was one of those inevitable things – you meet key people. After I got my psychology degree, I became very friendly with a very clever architect called Max Hutchinson and his friend was a man called Judge Smith. Max and I worked all the way through those years. We played in Aberdeen and we kept bands going. I moved to London and Max and Judge got together to form a band called Hebalob, and asked me to join. Hebalob had a few months before they burned out. Peter Hammill was a friend of Judge's and with perfect timing he said, "We like your playing and we need a sax player." He then said, "Would you come and share my flat with me?" So I did and I was in the band.

The Least We Can Do... cemented the VdGG sound. Was the band's direction discussed beforehand or was it an organic development?
I think it was completely organic. Peter was just churning out music. I had the privilege of living with him for six months. It was quite intense. He would literally come up with a song and play it to me. Sometimes I'd play a flute or a sax part to it and then we'd go out and busk the songs we'd just written, and it would turn out to be something like *Refugees*. We didn't get a lot of money! People hadn't really tuned in yet.

After The Flood was another one. I'd say, "Why don't we do this? Let's have a section like this, let's have a section like that." So, Peter and I had quite strong ideas, go to rehearsal, and bang, bang, bang, you've got *After The Flood*. Things were so quick because Hugh Banton, the organist, was so clever and then he'd do great arrangements. We had a 16-year-old bass player called Nic Potter, who was a true musician. The music poured out of him, but too much for VdGG. That's why he went his own way. Guy Evans was a lovely drummer and everyone was very talented.



***The Least We Can Do Is Wave To Each Other* (1970).**

How punishing was your touring schedule? And how did that affect the creation of _H To He..._?
It was relentless. I think we were just dashing in and out at that point, trying to fulfil our commitments and getting another album together. That album was a bit bitty, I think: there were sessions here and sessions there. But there was enough money to hire a baritone sax, and I'd gotten different electronic devices; I was experimenting all the time.

We lived in West Hampstead [in London], and we went into the office virtually every day when we weren't working to collect vinyl, so we were influenced by other Charisma bands. We'd meet other musicians and friends, it was a very nice lifestyle. It was a bit druggy in that we were smoking pot. It was the social norm in those days and you always passed on the left-hand side. Then somebody would be so legless they'd pass you all the stash!

What are your main memories of the Six-Bob Tour with Lindisfarne and Genesis?
It was great, great fellowship and everybody was so nice. And

Practise makes perfect, March 1975.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

He's a one-man woodwind section!

DAVID JACKSON ARCHIVES

we were different because Lindisfarne were Geordies and Genesis were very public school, but we were all very friendly. We had a fantastic tour manager, really nice roadies and a really nice team. The Six-Bob Tour was about merch – boxes of LPs were put into the foyer as well as T-shirts. That's where they made their money. And certainly not from the six-bob cover charge – that's 30p! It was like a mobile record store with a lot of gigs and we used to have fun. We decided to have one part of the set involving other people. So we'd come on for *After The Flood* and members of Genesis and Lindisfarne would join us.

> Most of my pulling out of things was for survival. I need a break from this. Peter had breaks several times and I had a break. But I tried not to rock the boat.

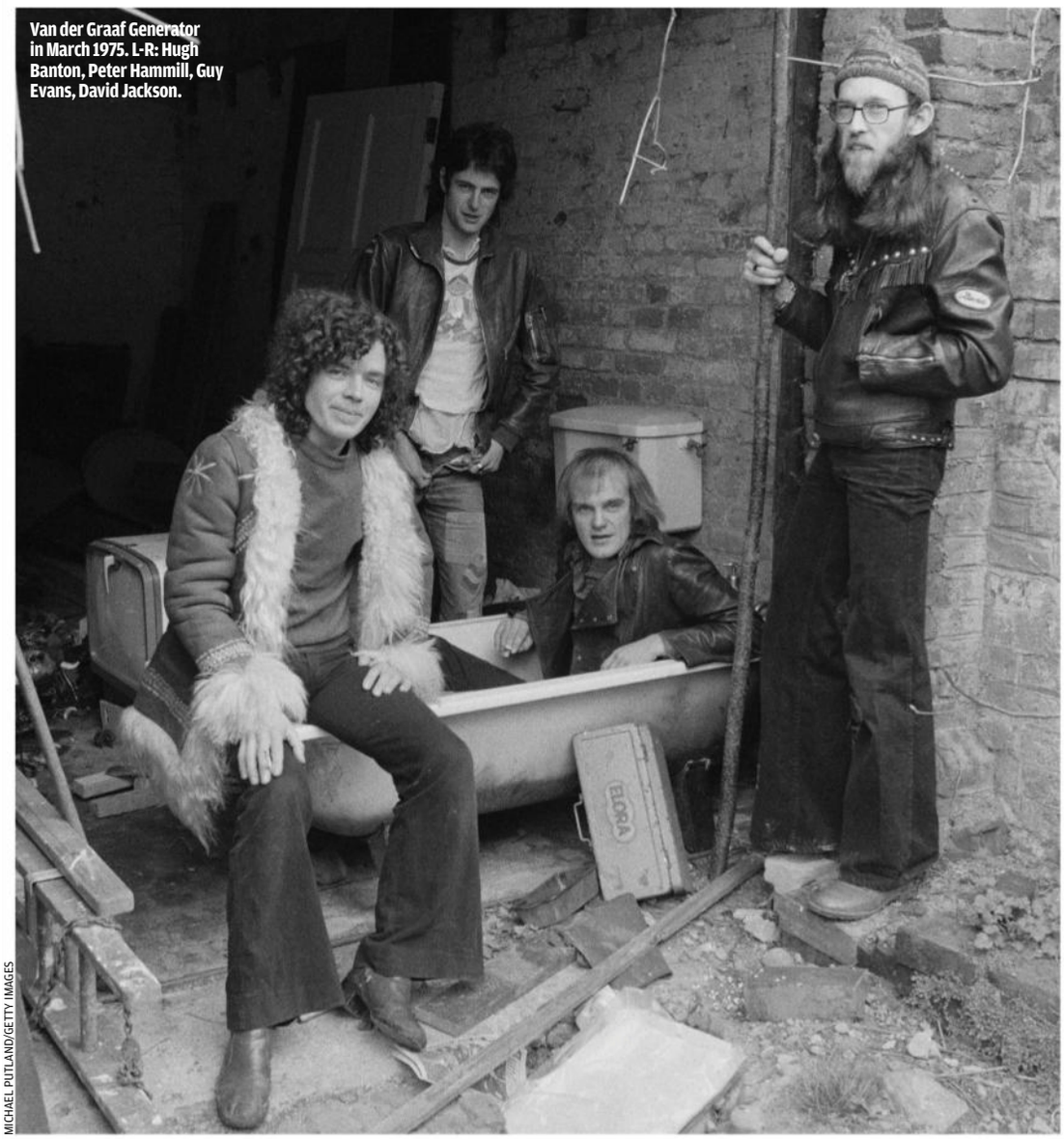
Why were VdGG so popular in Italy? It really was Generatormania, wasn't it?
Absolutely! It was a gift from the gods. And, like the Six-Bob Tour, it was business, business, business. Our manager, Tony Stratton Smith, decided that this is the way to sell prog rock music: this band are very fit and young and can manage to do two gigs a day. So we'd do a gig in the afternoon and again in the evening, and we'd drive like lunatics between every gig. We had two vans and two loads of gear. And this promoter, Maurizio Salvadori [Trident Music], invested a lot of money into the tour and he sold us to Italy.

Our first gig, there were police and soldiers because thousands of people thought that the Messiah was coming to Italy. If you hype things up enough, it does work. And Italy was ripe. They loved passionate music and they loved VdGG. They thought there was something magical there. And, of course, we believed. You know, this is a great audience. But again, it's a sign it got out of control. We were very, very big. We were No.1 [with *Pawn Hearts*] for 12 weeks in 1972 and the business people were making money. The promoters were getting 10 times what we were getting. They were building up their nest eggs. But you've got to love the Italians, man, because they're so passionate.

Pawn Hearts was conceived as a double album, but came out as a single. Why was that?
We weren't very experienced. The idea was a band album and a disc of solo pieces. My piece that I wanted to do was *The Blackshirts' Anthem*, which was extremely weird. Blackshirts were an issue, so I talked to Peter about it. He was familiar with the main theme of the music and he wrote some fantastic lyrics for me in Latin. But it was taking an eternity. We had to pay a lot of money to get tape operators and producers and it was just impractical. The record company pulled the plug and said, "Let's do a single album," but they'd already done the cover. That's why it was so big and evocative. But I think it was that stupid title of mine, *The Blackshirts' Anthem*, that influenced the photography and we ended that with that crazy picture in the middle.

Pawn Hearts (1971).

Lemmings and _A Plague Of Lighthouse Keepers_ are intense experiences. What were the challenges in constructing them?
We could only do it in sections, but we'd already kind of put our foot in the water of sectional work. Back in *H To He...*, we had to get the ridiculously complicated 12-minute piece, *Pioneers Over c*, right. And we couldn't play it because the sections were so complicated and we hadn't worked out how to join it all together. By the time we got around to *Lemmings* and *Man-Erg*, we worked out how to do it because we were desperate to play it live. You had music so strong you had to play it live, and other stuff that was so strong but too difficult. It ended up in a bottle on a shelf.



Van der Graaf Generator in March 1975. L-R: Hugh Banton, Peter Hammill, Guy Evans, David Jackson.

MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

We did it in sections and we were using 16 tracks. You could actually use the backing track and make a different version of that section. So that section actually was the same section again, but you didn't realise it.

Why did VdGG split in 1972?
Oh, it was an insane amount of pressure: we hadn't stopped for three years, basically. And now it's six months in Italy of going backwards and forwards for three tours in this insane heat and the intensity. Peter said, "I don't want to do it any more. I need a break" and he called a stop to it. It was out of control with other people controlling us. Peter needed to be creative and the only way to be creative was to take control of himself and not be stuck in a band. Even though the band wasn't going, he still liked our playing and we played on albums like [1973's] *Chameleon In The Shadow Of Night*, which were very much solo albums, but there were a lot of VdGG elements in them.

> The Six-Bob Tour was about merch – boxes of LPs were put into the foyer as well as T-shirts. That's where they made their money. And certainly not from the six-bob cover charge – that's 30p!

How did the VdGG project The Long Hello come about?
We loved playing with each other. And also we loved playing with Nic, the bass player, he was long gone, but hey, we could get him

back. It was all very hippie. We'd auditioned a guy called Dave Anderson who had a studio in Wales. My wife, Sue, knew of a house in the middle of nowhere, that we could get for nothing if we wanted to live there and go into the studio from there. We could work and have fun together. And we were never short of good material. Peter never stopped writing and the same with us. We were writing stuff. It wasn't VdGG so it had to be The Long Hello. What else could it be?

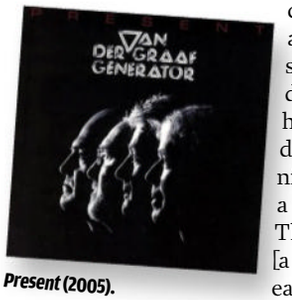
You all played on Peter Hammill's solo albums and even played live in his backing band. Were VdGG like a musical gentlemen's club?
That's quite a good analogy and I think it is a sort of gentlemen's club. None of us were going to commit suicide if the band folded. OK, it's going to be difficult from time to time and there may be arguments, but basically, we loved each other and respected each other. But the moment there was a gap, we'd go and do other things. I started driving for a living. I got Charisma Records to write me a reference saying I was one of the best tour managers they ever had so I could get an HGV licence.

VdGG recorded three albums in 13 months after the 1975 reunion. Did you go out of your way to court intensity?
There are musicians, there are record companies, and there are management companies. The fundamental mistake we made was that we signed to a management company who were our record company. There was no independent control over VdGG; we were without guidance. The only guiding light I had after 1973 was when I got married. My wife was very sensible, I had to agree things with her about what I was going to do or not going to do, because she could see the damage done by making mistakes and by working too hard.

And when we actually signed that second contract, we were told, "You agree you owe us 30 grand now because you did not recuperate on the last three albums." We were like, "Oh, God! What do we do?" We had no advice. Nothing. Because we were signed to the management and the record company at the same time, we were tying ourselves to the mast. We wanted to break even so that we could start earning money because we never had any money. We only had wages from gigs.

Keeping their own lane: David and René van Commenée.
RENÉ VAN COMMENÉE

Peter Hammill recently described *Vital* as "one of the most violent live albums ever". Why had you quit by this point and why did you later return to the band?
That would have been survival, I think. I felt at times that VdGG was a bit out of control. I had a family and I got very anxious and very insecure. My marriage was the strongest thing in my life and I had to protect that. I didn't realise, but I was actually developing some serious health problems. I mean, what I do with the saxes is very physically demanding. I was a very heavy smoker and anything that would go in between a cigarette paper would do me. Most of my pulling out of things was for survival. I need a break from this. I mean, Peter had breaks several times and I had a break. But I tried not to rock the boat.



Present (2005).

VdGG got back together and released *Present* in 2005, which was followed by a successful tour. How did that reunion come about and why did you leave again afterwards?
It came about because we were all friends. I remember one evening, Peter came round and I found all the vinyl that we'd stolen from Charisma Records all those years ago. It was about three in the morning and we were playing the vinyl. It was great fun. Now, Peter always calls the shots when it comes to VdGG, and he suddenly said he wanted to do it. But as it happened, the next day after the vinyl night we went for a walk along the Thames at Henley [a town in the south-east of England] and Peter was slowing down and slowing down and I said, "Are you OK, man?" It was really cold and he started taking off his coat, took off his jumper, and took off his shirt. He was down to a T-shirt now, sitting on a bench and it was freezing. And I suddenly said, "I don't think he's alright" and I rang my wife up. She said, "He's having a heart attack" and we got him to hospital. So we're in 2003 and it takes a year and a half for him to get over that. During that time, we decided to work on the album and by 2005 it was all sewn up and we were going to do this, that and the other and off we went. But, you know, I thought it would just be a reunion. I didn't want it to be out of control again.

You've worked with a huge number of Italian bands. What keeps you going back there?
I get asked! I can't turn them down! And I've just agreed to join another one in the last couple of days. It's so exciting. Every gig you do in Italy is an event and it's a fellowship; I always meet people and share experiences with them. The bands love me playing with them; they make it fun and they look after me well.

How is it playing with your daughter, Dorie, in the band Kaprekar's Constant?
She's a brilliant singer and it's divine working with her. I do a lot of harmony parts and she does as well, which is something that she can do instinctively. She's refused me trying to teach her how to read music, which I think is her saving grace because she's not restricted. When we play live, we do the loveliest things and my alto sax sounds beautiful with her alto voice. It's a delight!

You've teamed up once again with Dutch artist René van Commenée for *Keep Your Lane*. Why did you record a new version of VdGG's *Pioneers Over C*?
Unfinished business, really. For the gigs at the Marquee that became *Vital*, they said, "We're going to play *Pioneers...*". Unfortunately, the sax tracks were never recorded on any of the three days. So, Guy went off to Foel Studio to try and sort it out. And when it came out, I said, "The sax sounds weird."

He said, "That took me two weeks to get the sax from the spill on other tracks." So I was always a bit annoyed about that because it really was the first and the only time we played that song. I just wanted to have another crack at it. René said he'd love to as well, and then we did it.

Keep Your Lane is out now via Talking Elephant. See jaxontonewall.com for more info.

HAWKWIND

To infinity and beyond! The space rock icons' late-career renaissance continues on their 36th studio album.

Words: Jeremy Allen **Illustration:** Mark Leary

Hawkwind's 21st-century renaissance may never quite live up to the Liberty/UA years, but that doesn't stop them trying. Their time on Cherry Red, from 2016's *The Machine Stops* onwards, has lasted longer and been more productive than any other period in their lengthy career.

It's been a surprisingly robust and consistent eight years, with a new record arriving in each calendar year (counting 2022's live *We Are Looking In On You* album). Dave Brock's interchangeable cast of merry men (and occasional woman) may no longer have youth on their side, and they might miss some of the visual swagger of graphic designer Barney Bubbles with his impudent hidden references and outlandish folded cardboard sleeves, but make no mistake, the Hawkwind of the present are a force to be reckoned with.

Stories From Time And Space — a HG Wellsian title if ever there was one — shares some of the visual symmetry of *Space Ritual*. It has an ominous-looking clock on the cover with an almost futuristic "2024" written across the face; it's a date that has the dystopian ring of vintage sci-fi about it, made all the more surreal given that Hawkwind are still here putting out albums 55 years after they first emerged out of Ladbroke Grove.

A band that have always looked forwards have been looking rearwards with recent ventures: *The Future Never Waits* from last year was arranged so that the album ran backwards sequentially. Here, songs — like thoughts — are more fragmented, with reminiscences and future projections overlapping each other like the components of a vast collage. Moreover, the album plays the neat trick of presenting sonic space on the one hand and intricacy on the other, with each new play likely to offer up further detail that might have gone unnoticed previously.

Opener *Our Lives Can't Last Forever* is a strange place to start, even if it sets things up thematically. It feels a little over-earnest and distinctly uncosmic on a first listen: a power ballad that treads similar ground to post-Waters-era Pink Floyd, with some curious choices made at the mixing desk as the organ overrides everything while Brock's vocal sits deep in the mix, and yet the fragility and the sincerity of the song save it. It's a pragmatic and characteristically pessimistic assessment of man's long-term chances, and when Brock sings about the lines on his face reflected in the mirror, he's addressing his own mortality. Aged 82, and having suffered a spell of ill-health recently, one suspects it's probably something that crosses his mind from time to time.

Stories From Time And Space

CHERRY RED

> **A deeply cosmic record that's out there with their very best.**

That opener vastly contrasts with *The Starship (One Love One Life)*, a space banger that has a transcendent quality with a Rastafari philosophy and a Latin groove, and one that would sound magnificent covered by John Shuttleworth on a Bontempi organ, such is its charm. It, along with *Till I Found You*, is one of the finer latter-day Hawkwind songs; both have indelible melodies imprinted on unusual grooves that lodge easily in the cerebral cortex. The same, too, can be said for the pounding near title track *Traveller Of Time & Space*, which is grounded by an infectious two-part harmony and offset by vertiginous Frippertronic-style guitars. It breaks down at the midway point as theremins and ascending strings appear out of nowhere like benign invaders entering the empyrean.

What Are We Going To Do While We're Here further exemplifies this playful shifting within the same landscape, drifting from ambient noodling to attacking motorik urgency, resplendent with forceful, distorted guitars and what sounds like space static from György Ligeti's soundtrack to Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. If that weren't enough transmogrifying for one lifetime, the whole thing then slips into a smooth sax break at the conclusion. It's not all wild sprawl, with short intermissions of ambient mood such as *Eternal Light* — redolent this time of an Eduard Artemyev soundtrack from one of Andrei Tarkovsky's 70s sci-fi epics — and *The Black Sea*, which tacitly references Ligeti again.

Artemyev and Ligeti are appropriate references given the cinematic scope of *Stories From Time And Space*, and the fact it takes us on a journey reminiscent of those bold, strange, ambitious sci-fi pictures that demand to be looked at on the big screen in an unrestored 70mm print. The further we venture, the more it feels like being lost in deep space with only memories for company, and the creeping sense that the voyage might all be one big trip. This is transportative music that offers up lost futures and moments of nostalgia for evocations that may never have belonged to us in the first place. *Stories From Time And Space* is a deeply cosmic record, that might just be out there with their very best.

KATI RÁN

Sála SVART

Dutch artist presents a Nordic folk masterpiece years in the making.

Like The History Channel set to music, the last decade has seen a wave of Nordic folk that is, if not quite blinking in the mainstream light, at least peering out towards it from the elf-woven shadows of a sacred cave. Wardruna were the first, coming to wider attention via the semi-historical drama *Vikings*, paving the way for Heilung, and their ilk.

> **It flits between mythology and reality in breathtaking style.**

More recently, Kati Rán contributed to 2022's flashy sequel-of-sorts *Vikings: Valhalla*, as well as working on video-game soundtracks. There's no question of the Dutch multi-instrumentalist being a mere tourist or bandwagoneer, however. *Sála* is a deep delve into Nordic mythology and soundscaping, which absolutely bleeds passion and integrity.

For a start it's been a long time in the making, with the first lyrics dating back to 2015 — the year Rán released her last album, *Lys*, with her former band L.E.A.F. While ostensibly treading similar ground, that album had a shinier, surface-level beauty but lacked the depth found on *Sála*. She probably couldn't have made this follow-up without the years of research, collaborations and artistic growth that followed.

Unlike *Lys*, this isn't an immediate album. There are stirring and dramatic moments certainly, but it also features a number of lengthy compositions that need space to grow and breathe. *Blodbylgje* clocks in at a little over 15 minutes but doesn't outstay its welcome. It ebbs and flows with oceanic swells and features an outstanding duet with black metal veteran Kristian 'Gaahl' Espedal. The former Gorgoroth and Wardruna vocalist appears sporadically throughout the album, but on this track in particular the juxtaposing voices conjure a beautiful primal power.

Stone Pillars, one of the few songs delivered in English, again features Gaahl alongside Mitch Harris of Napalm Death. Slow and mysterious, it's another ritualistic trip that's easy to lose yourself in, with wonderfully layered vocals and captivating percussion performed on a rediscovered lava stone marimba — a lower-toned cousin of the xylophone played with mallets. The instrumentation and structures are engrossing throughout as Rán and her collaborators — also including members of Heilung, Sígur Rós, a vocal choir and more — conjure the sounds and atmospheres needed for the breadth of the album's mythmaking.

Sála is old Norse for both 'sea' and 'soul' and the Dutch artist weaves themes of her namesake and sea goddess Rán alongside a mystical concept of soul retrieval. The result is an album that flits between mythology and the singer's own reality in a unique and breathtaking style.

PAUL TRAVERS

A BURIAL AT SEA

Closer To Home PELAGIC

Irish instrumental post-rock duo dream of home on second album.

In the four years since their self-titled debut, A Burial At Sea moved from their native Ireland to Liverpool. *Closer To Home* sees the duo drawing inspiration from their homeland, its culture and cragged landscapes.

There's a dichotomy to the record: for every moment like the lulling ambience of *Páirc Béal Uisce*, there's a more abrasive counterpoint, typified by the pinball-machine-caught-in-a-hurricane riff that spearheads *Gorse Bush On Fire*. On *Hy-Brasil*, they flaunt both sides of their sonic coin, with wistful brass harmonies icing twangy math rock guitars before a monsoon of distortion and reverb takes over.

There are all the textures that can be expected from a post-rock band – shimmery guitars, daydreaming drums and sad cinema crescendos – but added brass gives the band a distinct edge. It gives *Everything You Are Not* a wistful, melancholic flavour, though that instrumentation is more acrobatic on *Dall*, with its haunting horns, ocean-mimicking cymbal swells and an air of bittersweet triumph. There's nothing bittersweet about the record though – *Closer To Home* is carefully crafted and expertly executed. **POW**

ADULT CINEMA

365 ILLICIT RECORDINGS

Blockbuster concept suite creates annus mirabilis.

Mike Weston has been self-releasing DIY albums as Adult Cinema for some years, but his fourth is his first to go heroically, unabashedly 'full prog'. Four tracks, each around 15 minutes, build a kind of four seasons suite, with each piece evoking the balance between optimism and pessimism of the year's cycle and, by extension, the arc of life. It could be absurdly overambitious. By the end, he's knocked it out of the park.

Mostly instrumental, *365* doffs its hat to the epic monoliths of Wakeman, Pink Floyd and even Tangerine Dream, but does so with such enthusiasm and gusto that it sweeps the listener along on its meticulously paced journey. The vocal interjections, from Asian chatter to a reggae toast, are perhaps the least effective ingredients (on *Spring*, they kill the vibe), but musically this surges seamlessly between Jarre-like electronic pulses to organic, orgiastic rock, complete with Gilmour-esque solos.

There's remarkable sleight of hand in the way *Summer* shifts (with a dash of The Isleys) from cosmic soul to heated jams, and *Winter*, naturally more pensive, eventually sees sunshine melting the frost. A very good year. **CR**

ARTIFICIAL LANGUAGE

Distant Glow ARTIFICIALLANGUAGE.BANDCAMP.COM

US prog metallers deliver impressive concept.

On their third release, Artificial Language continue to push technical proficiency as well as the boundaries of modern prog.

Vocalist Shay Lewis demonstrates a refined, controlled vocal masterclass, which sees him effortlessly interchanging commanding, majestic clean singing with punchy, aggressive shouting. Guitarists Victor Corral and Charlie Robbins's playing intertwines and complements the other, with the latter's melodies being the most intricate and engaging that Artificial Language have ever created. *Distant Glow* thematically centres on an apocalyptic event and its effects on the relationship between a father and son, with strong conspiracy theories circling them, powerful lead guitars and Lewis's vocals knitting together feelings of hope and despair.

The storytelling is evident via the musical mood changes throughout, and where the story's father is deciding whether his son is capable of mass annihilation, the chugging guitars and slower, pounding reinforce the dystopian feel. *Distant Glow* is 2024's finest masterpiece of technical progressive metal so far, and a must-listen for fans of the genre. **CF**

AYREON

01011001 - Live Beneath The Waves MUSIC THEORIES RECORDINGS/MASCOT LABEL GROUP

Arjen Lucassen brings galactic-sized 2008 magnum opus to life.

Ayreon's 2008 concept album *1011001* was the tale of an alien race facing extinction and its subsequent progenation on Earth via a DNA-laden comet. Given that Arjen Lucassen never intended it to be played live, it seems an unlikely work to adapt for the stage 15 years later.

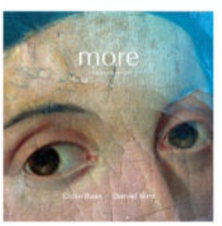
But that's what happened in September 2023, when Lucassen recreated this multilayered epic during a five-night residency at Tilburg's Poppodium 013 venue, enlisting 17 different singers to bring it life. But as this double CD/triple LP live album, recorded during those shows, the exuberance of the music and the sound of ensemble voices battling for attention demonstrate what an inspired choice it was.

Sonically (and visually in the case of the accompanying Blu-ray) it's superb: the band and string section successfully provide the shifting musical textures, from power metal to folk rock to electronic ambience. The singers, ranging from Anneke van Giersbergen to Arena's Damian Wilson, are on uniformly stellar form with their solos, various duets, multi-part harmonies and massed vocals. A tour de force of symphonic rock and rock opera. **GMM**

COLIN BASS & DANIEL BIRO

More SARGASSO

Camel man Bass brings Andy Latimer in for *More*.



The debut record from these collaborators, *Still*, released during the 2020 lockdown, was an utterly gorgeous, synth-steeped ambient antidote to the emotional upheaval of the period. Best known for his work with Camel, Colin Bass contributed customary bass and blue-eyed soul vocals while Daniel Biro – a Hungarian composer, based in London since '85 – gave cinematic framing to a socially-distant salve.

More finds the pair reconvening for an 11-track song-based set. It lands on the softer, AOR-ish side of prog as well as referencing mid-70s Camel, with massed harmonies and Vaseline-lensed Fender Rhodes chords leading the Latin grooves of the title track. Camel's Andy Latimer plays several thrilling turns, his guitar presence leaping out from the smooth *New Worlds* and the Beatlesy *Deep Fake*, then switching to flute for standout *Dinner In Delphi*.

There's a lot to sink into; Bass's rich vocals, the velvety mix, the poignant touches on love songs such as *I Wish*, *Sailor's Lament* and *Smile Of Smiles*. The latter two take advantage of Biro's soundscaping, with Bass's subtly jazzy bass against Latimer's tranquil lines, creating almost Eno/Lanois lullabies. **JK**

THE BEGGS SISTERS

Sleep With The Ghost THEBEGGSSISTERS.BANDCAMP.COM

The Beggs family showcase their harmonious side.

The presence of Nick Beggs, in a rare showing on upright bass, may be the selling point of this seven-track EP for prog fans, but it's his daughters Willow and Lula who command the spotlight. The vibe is warm, soothing and gently uplifting as the songs make use of the sisters' exquisite ability to harmonise. The siblings both play acoustic guitar and ukulele, positioning the sound somewhere in the vicinity of folk.

Transition Period is a standout, with an inviting melody, lush harmonies and lyrics about facing the end of a relationship but emerging out of the sadness into something new. There's elegant bowing on the bass from Nick on *Sleep With The Ghost* and his subtle playing on tracks including *Just Fine* pulses like a reassuring heartbeat beneath the voices.

If there's a theme to this seven-track, it's one of emotional healing. *'I know the past is painful, but the future wants to reach you,'* they sing in *Sarah*, while *Dead Man Walking* is a soft-edged rebuke to anyone who'd try to deny someone their dreams. It's a rather lovely experience for anyone seeking to let the weight of their worries slip from their shoulders. **DW**

SIX BY SIX

Beyond Shadowland INSIDEOUTMUSIC

Second full-length album by the melodic prog supergroup.

Six By Six are bass guitarist, vocalist and keyboardist Robert Berry, who has recorded with Alliance and 3 with Keith Emerson and Carl Palmer; guitarist Ian Crichton from Canadian proggers Saga; and drummer Nigel Glockler, a veteran of Saxon, who has also played with Asia. But their individual chemistry produces a more wide-ranging approach than their CVs might imply on this second album.

> **These veterans pump out a formidable kilowattage of energy.**

Their 'sounds like' list is extensive. There's an overlap with Spock's Beard and Flying Colors and despite Glockler's background in metal, Six By Six are more hard rock. Going further back, it feels a safe guess that they've absorbed some Blue Öyster Cult, Deep Purple and the meldoic wallop of Kansas and Styx. But there's a lot more here besides. Recorded in San Francisco, *Beyond Shadowland* has an expansive, widescreen recorded sound with vivid vocal melodies and with synths and electronics infiltrating their power trio approach. And when Crichton gets the wind in his sails, the results are spectacular. His solo on *Spectre* begins with elliptical picking patterns, then a chug with dampened strings acts a launch pad out into the shredosphere, then back down again through extravagant bent notes that remind of Allan Holdsworth with a little of the audaciousness of Jeff Beck.

We shouldn't really be surprised any more by the longevity of musicians, but Crichton is 67, Berry isn't telling but has been active since the 1970s, and Glockler is 71 and has been rocked by health issues. So given all that it's both heartening and certainly worth mentioning that these veterans pump out a formidable kilowattage of energy. *Beyond Shadowland* comes across as remarkably fresh and punchy. On the surface it's perhaps a tad less bombastic than their debut, but one can hear evidence of Crichton's claim that this new material is more nuanced and adventurously structured, and there's a lot going on around the band's big tunes.

Wren begins underpinned by a sequential synth, with Berry's rubbery bass and commanding vocals — which have the feel of Greg Lake and John Wetton about them — running up against crunching power chords spiced up with a little dissonance, which seems to turn the melody inside-out. *Obiliex* is structured around acoustic guitar and is more reflective as it travels towards to its climax, and on *Titans* the vocal incantations and rhythmically intricate pan-global funk patterns are not so far removed from 90s King Crimson. The lengthy, episodic finale *One Step* finds them interspersing classical guitar and piano with more typical powerplay and is another pointer to where they might travel in the future. **MIKE BARNES**

KAVUS TORABI

The Banishing BELIEVERS ROAST

Psychedelic polymath draws a line under the past with great results.

Since his emergence in the early 90s, Iranian-born, Plymouth-raised multi-instrumentalist Kavus Torabi has remained a singular and distinctive figure in the spheres of psychedelic and progressive music.

Along the way, he's lent his six-string talents to a number of idiosyncratic names including Cardiacs, Guapo and Chrome Hoof, while remaining at the heart of the lysergic funk of The Monsoon Bassoon and third-eye rinsers

> **Deeper scratching reveals more of the man behind the music.**

Knifeworld. More recently, he's participated with Mediæval Bæbes, become an integral member of the post-Daevid Allen line-up of Gong while starting the unlikely yet successful experimental project The Utopia Strong with former snooker champion Steve Davis and musician Michael J York. And that's just scratching the surface.

The Banishing, Torabi's second solo album, is where that deeper scratching reveals more of the man behind the music than any of his previous work. Recording began in the wake of its predecessor *Hip To The Jag* in the spring of 2020, but a deterioration in Torabi's mental health saw him become not only estranged from his family, but also leaving the city that he'd called home for the previous 30 years. And while the title refers to his move to the more bucolic environs of the West Country, Korabi also sees it in more magical terms as a banishing ritual.

For all that, *The Banishing* isn't an album that feels sorry for itself. Instead, this is a naked confessional. While the lyrical concerns take a razor-sharp scalpel to cut away the dead flesh of the past, the music blossoms and opens with each return visit. The airy and gossamer opener *The Horizontal Man* picks up where the ethereal *Hip To The Jag* left off, but this proves to be a red herring as the spaghetti western-influenced *Snake Humanis* comes bounding close behind.

The real balancing act becomes apparent as *The Banishing* rolls on. Only the hardest of hearts would remain unmoved by *Push The Faders,* as Torabi admits, *'When I kicked and screamed like a child, I scared you away... I never knew I'd be this way, I thought that I'd be stronger'* against a musical backdrop that rises in subtle intensity while making welcome nods to harmonised Frippertronics. Similarly, *The Sweetest Demon* finds the singer lamenting, *'Now you drink alone because it hurts too much'*, juxtaposing his introspection with an insistent and nagging melody.

Torabi's voice is a plaintive joy throughout, informed as it is by painful experiences while looking ahead. While the bounce of *Untethered* is informed by resignation, the only way is forward. And that's exactly where Kavus Torabi is going.

JULIAN MARSZALEK

CANDACRAIG

Lit By Lightning FIERCELY INDEPENDENT

Second album from agreeably unorthodox Sleaford pair.

This Lincolnshire duo began recording their own folk-inspired neo-prog material after their regular work as actors and in tribute acts dried up during the pandemic. Their second self-released album is shot through with likeably idiosyncratic touches.

Gliding, Pt 2 employs a bucolic, flute-flecked acoustic backing to colour a sketch of life on the road, and pulls off the feat of making Transit vans, *'coffee at South Mimms Costa'* and a station announcer-style list of venues including *'The Arches, Glasgow, The Roadhouse, Manchester'* somehow sound positively romantic.

There's a sense of folky protest about *Hero Of Barnsdale*, which starts as a rollicking acoustic number in tribute to *'the giant, the miller, the fat clergyman'* but then slows into a litany of government crimes (*'Pandora papers, Panama scandal, tax-dodging favours'*), suggesting we salute Robin Hood and drink *'til we all fall over'*.

Sharon Cannings' soaring voice helps *Fortune Favours The Brave* succeed, even if the playing isn't the tightest. There's an irresistible sense of home-made music positively benefitting from a lack of varnish or attention to songwriting convention. **JS**

COSMOGRAF

Live At The 1865 GRAVITY DREAM MUSIC

Rare live performance captured direct from the soundboard.

Labelled an 'Official Bootleg', this is a refreshingly unembellished live recording from Robin Armstrong's Cosmograf, captured for posterity in Southampton in May 2023. Cosmograf have largely been a studio project and one-man operation, but here, assisted by guitarist Lee Abraham, bassist Alastair Martin, and drummer Kyle Fenton, Armstrong proves an engaging and potent live presence.

The setlist goes back as far as 2011's *When Age Has Done Its Duty* for the track *Bakelite Switch.* Lyrically, that one is a little guilty of tapping into prog's enthusiasm for harking back to the 1970s as a golden age, but there's some great soloing from Armstrong on keys and Abraham on guitar. The influence of David Gilmour is apparent in the mournful guitar of *Regretful Refrain* and Armstrong successfully channels the ambition of the studio recordings by using string samples in *British Made.*

The whole experience seems untouched by post-production makeovers. Some of the high notes in *The Motorway* might land a little off centre but *Live At The 1865* captures the energy of live performance with greater fidelity than many more polished or autotuned outings. **DW**

ALISON COTTON

Engelchen ROCKET RECORDINGS

A sobering, mesmeric reflection on darkness and hope.

Originally half of folk rock duo The Left Outsides, Alison Cotton has established herself over the past few years as a maker of compelling avant-drone soundscapes, often with specific stories as their inspiration. Her latest album is based on the real life story of sisters Ida and Louise Cook, the *engelchen* ('little angels') of the title, who, through the connections they'd forged as opera fans in 1930s Europe, rescued 29 Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany.

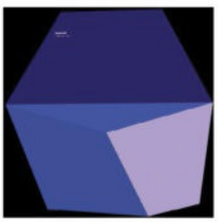
The album begins with *We Were Smuggling People's Lives*, a 20-minute cinematic lament of sombre strings, wordless plainsong and foley recordings, evoking a grey veil falling over the world, but also the possibility of escape. As Cotton's viola swoops, the pure harmonies of her voice contrast with marching drums and hissing machines.

The title track voices the sisters' determination in the cadence of traditional folk, while the ancient resonance of Cotton's harmonium on *The Letter Burning* creates ghostly chamber music. As *Engelchen Now* concludes, *'Who would have believed in 80 years' time history repeating itself?'* A thoughtful, moving release. **JB**

ELEPHANT9

Mythical River RUNE GRAMMOFON

Norwegian jazz rockers' 10th album burns bright.



Picking up where 2020's *Arrival Of The New Elders* left off, Elephant9 continue to explore their articulate blend of jazz and rock. Like its predecessor's sequence of carefully constructed instrumentals, their new album doesn't waste any time in framing its thoughtful melodicism with a sense of gleeful, charismatic abandon.

Party Among The Stars plugs into an acid rock vibe, as keyboardist Ståle Storløkken lets loose with a rollicking Hammond solo that ducks and dives amid bassist Nikolai Hængsle and drummer Torstein Lofthus's speedy trajectory. While utterly contemporary, frequent reference points that fans of 70s-era progressive music of both rock and jazz sides will instantly recognise are cleverly built into Elephant9's work. The mischievously knotty *Star Cluster Detective* opens with a organ figure that evokes Egg's quasi-classical musings, and which later collides into runs whose unruly energy recalls Lifetime's explosive 1970 debut, *Emergency.*

These remarkable, shape-shifting swings of tone and colour, coupled with a canny grasp of dynamic control, lend the album an unrelenting drive that's hard to resist. **SS**

BRIAN ENO

Eno (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack) UMC

A snapshot of the influential producer, artist and self-confessed non-musician.

Such has been the influence and voluminous output of Brian Eno that any attempt to curate his 50-plus-year career short of a box set is always going to come up short. And so it goes with this soundtrack to director Gary Hustwit's documentary, *Eno.* This album is as noteworthy for what's missing as what's included – witness the absence of his work with Robert Fripp, David Bowie and Talking Heads as well as his origins with Roxy Music, among others.

And yet *Eno OST* works as an album in its own right. By not sequencing the music in a chronological order, Eno's career is given a sense of surprise as one time period bounces to another without the drag of predictability. Three previously unreleased tracks in the shape of the uncharacteristically nostalgic *All I Remember*, the delicate *By This River (Live At The Acropolis)* and *Lighthouse # 429 01*'s obtuse shapes sit comfortably with the more familiar *Third Uncle* and *Sky Saw* as well as collaborations including *He Renomo* with Cluster and the sublime *Regiment* with David Byrne.

All in all, a fine taster for newcomers and a prompt for converts. **JM**

ROTEM GEFFEN

The Night Is The Night THANASIS PRODUCTIONS

Otherworldly, minimal, inspirational nocturnes.

The night has preoccupied many a writer. How can a period that intimates love, dancing, and mystery also summon horror, loneliness and suffering? Rotem Geffen's *The Night Is The Night* explores the dichotomy fully.

Stockholm-based singer, pianist and composer Geffen is the alter ego of Nelly Klayman-Cohen, and the album continues the wraithlike liminality of her 2021 debut EP *You Guard The Key.* Minimally orchestrated arrangements showcase Geffen's delicate, expressive vocals as she ambles through eight pieces supported by piano, cello and harmonium. Her lyrics, written in German, English and Hebrew, are often disquieting. Her songs offer a deceptive, repetitive simplicity that often shields rawness and yearning.

I Beg is the stand-out; its sweet sing-song quality is rendered at once warm and distressing by the arrival of sousaphones and bass clarinets, while *I Always Know* comes on like a fever dream with Geffen repeatedly singing '*out of my throat comes the biggest flower.*' The lambent meandering of nine-minute closer *Hide* rounds out a bold, experimental record for these increasingly bizarre times. **DEA**

TRANSATLANTIC

Live At Morsefest 2022: The Absolute Whirlwind INSIDEOUTMUSIC

Two whole-album sets and the rest from Euro-American supergroup.

It's commonplace for prog acts to recommend that listeners consume their music "like a book" and/or "in one sitting", in conscious opposition, perhaps, to the cherry-pick-your-favourite-tracks approach the digital era has fostered. But presented with the two 140-minute-plus shows included here, which prog supergroup Transatlantic performed across two nights at keyboard player and vocalist Neal Morse's Morsefest in 2022, a double-bill might stretch even the most tenacious fan's concentration span.

> **The energy levels are cranked up considerably.**

Both shows were centred around full performances of two entire albums, 2020's *The Absolute Universe* and 2009's *The Whirlwind.* Despite the considerable reserves of energy and concentration required — not to mention memory in attempting to recall such structurally complex musical pieces seemingly without sheet music or autocues — the energy levels are cranked up considerably compared to the studio versions. Even when listening without the accompanying DVD footage, it's clear how fully these men, three of them already in their 60s when this was recorded, are injecting these marathon sets with an infectious passion that would outdo performers a third of their age.

After warming up with crowd-pleasers such as a sing-along rendition of *We All Need Some Light* a rifftastic reading of Procol Harum's *In Held 'Twas In I*, both from the band's 2000 debut, we're into *The Whirlwind* as Wagnerian sturm und drang fills the air. Later, *Lay Down Your Life* is full of dramatic, verging-on-camp tritones and a charismatic guest vocal from Spock's frontman Ted Leonard, strutting across a constantly evolving syncopated rhythmic stomp. And even those who belong to the *'ungodly world'* Neal Morse sings of in *Set Us Free* will find it hard not to be swept up as *Dancing With Eternal Glory* bursts into choral ecstasy testifying to the spirit, whether holy or imaginary, that imbues these performances.

Presumably after spending a night in an oxygen tent, they still had sufficient reserves of energy to fire up the band's most recent (and supposedly final) album *The Absolute Universe* with similar vim and vigour, which fizzes from this recording on the joyous synth-decorated romp of *Reaching For The Sky*, the muscular prog-metal textures of *The World We Used To Know* and a melodramatic *Owl Howl.* This time the greatest hits come after the album set, with a soulful revisit of *Bridge Across Forever* from the 2001 album of the same name, before a medley springing forth from *Duel With The Devil* adds a 26-minute coda. Once again, Morse means more. **JOHNNY SHARP**

★CLASSIC★ ROCK

HIGH VOLTAGE ROCK'N'ROLL

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STEVE HILLAGE

Paris Bataclan 11.12.79 MADFISH

Recently unearthed a high-quality full set on double CD.

Towards the end of the 70s, Steve Hillage raised a few eyebrows by admitting his love for the funk of Bootsy's Rubber Band and Earth, Wind & Fire. By the time of this performance – just after the release of *Open* – the rhythm section of drummer Andy Anderson and Paul Francis's animated slap-bass funkifies songs such as *Unidentified (Flying Being)* and *New Age Synthesis (Unzipping The Zype)*.

Not all the music lends itself to this treatment and they can also settle into driving – sometimes rather foursquare – rock rhythms. But no matter, for Hillage fans this set is highly recommended. It includes the only live recording of *Earthrise*, which references music by Egyptian singer Om Kalthoum. Having guested with Sham 69 at the 1978 Reading Festival, Hillage, who felt just as anti-establishment as the punks, went down that route on *1988 Aktivator* and *Getting In Tune*. It was probably best to leave well alone, but he just about got away with it.

Alongside sleeker material from *Open* there's a feisty version of *The Salmon Song* and Hillage's soloing is ecstatic throughout, peaking on a fabulous, wah-wah heavy excursion on *Searching For The Spark*. **MB**

JEAN-MICHEL JARRE

Versailles 400 Live SONY

Le roi retourne sur son trône.

His concerts illuminating cityscapes in Houston, London's Docklands, Tiananmen Square and the pyramids at Giza have been masterful statements in sound and vision. Yet thanks to the internet, Jean-Michel Jarre's recent live events have been more intimate, albeit with a wider global reach than ever before.

On Christmas Day 2023, he played an updated, beat-rich greatest hits set in the splendour of the Hall Of Mirrors at the Palace of Versailles as part of the French landmark's 400th birthday celebrations. Performing simultaneously in front of a live and virtual audience, this eternal pioneer entwined AI with reality, transitioning his avatar into human form with visuals as stunning as one has come to expect from such a leader in the field.

The music on *Versailles 400 Live* is bold, romantic, melodic, grandiose and often truly danceable. On 2016's *The Architect*, a collaboration with DJ Jeff Mills, the line between teacher and pupil is truly blurred. Now Mike Oldfield has retired and Vangelis is no longer with us, it's delightful that Jean-Michel Jarre is still very much here, forging forward and still making music of such gravity. **DEA**

LARRY KUTCHER

Vertical Realms LARRYKUTCHER.BANDCAMP.COM

New age keyboardist continues lifelong spiritual odyssey.

Initially influenced by surrealism, beat poetry and the music of Frank Zappa, LA-based keyboard virtuoso Larry Kutcher went to collaborate with Steve Vai and Alan and Neal Morse of Spock's Beard. His second solo album has a refreshingly 'all doors open' approach to spiritual matters, its calming, mind-expanding instrumentals like a sonic head massage as Kutcher draws inspiration from Native American Shamanism (*The Shaman's Path*), Zen Buddhism (*The Lotus Garden*) and other belief systems.

Kutcher's 2023 debut *Kindred Souls* was a solo piano work, but here dizzying filter-sweep synths and complex plucked motifs reminiscent of Swiss electro-acoustic harpist Andreas Vollenweider bring a panoramic sense of scale and wonder to *Vertical Realms*. Nor is there anything remotely muzak-like about these carefully composed tunes, Kutcher tapping a cosmic, natural world-sensitive vibe not dissimilar to analogue synth composer Nico Georis's 2023 LP *Cloud Suites*. Immersion in this meditative positivity feels good for the soul, a tonic. Indeed, if more people listened to Kutcher driving to work, instances of road rage would likely halve. **JMN**

EXPERIMENTAL PROG

Ambient, electronica and oddities through the monocle of **Jo Kendall**.

Listening to excerpts of *John Cage Shock*, Yoko Ono's 1962 performance with John Cage and David Tudor, at her *Music Of The Mind* exhibition in London has put us in the mood for the latest Experimental column, which begins with percussionist-composer-producer **Amy Aileen Wood**'s *The Heartening* (Colorfield). With upright and electric bass, autoharp and sax in the mix, Wood uses a wide range of instruments from trad rock kit to kalimba, gamelan and various synths in this jazzy, smoky collection that also features her collaborator, acclaimed US singer Fiona Apple, on several tracks, breathing, humming, laughing in a very Yoko way at times. At the intersection of hip-hop, electronica, jazz and rock, kindred mixing-it-up spirits are Kassa Overall and Luke Vibert.

Appearing, at times, under the name Pulse Emitter, Portland musician **Daryl Groetsch**'s business is the wide landscape of ambient music, and business continues to be good with his self-released relaxation tool *Above The Shore*. Stare into the blue yonder of the sleeve and drop the needle for a long-form float-tank for the brain — fat, smooth layers of sound which glide effortlessly from moment to moment over 75 minutes. It was designed for napping or meditation, but this reviewer found it more of a brisk ocean adventure.

It's 400 years since the death of Britain's most celebrated sacred music creator, William Byrd, the Catholic composer living on the edge a little in service to protestant Queen Elizabeth I. Following a commission from Radio 3, Kieran Brunt's 12-strong vocal group **Shards** present *Byrd Song* (Erased Tapes), eight beautiful pieces that apply autotune, decaying delays and programmed electronica beside traditional a cappella for a stunning set that quivers with light-and-dark depth.

A concept work about meteor-induced ice viruses in Siberia? We'll take it. **Aidan Baker**'s two-track *Pithovirii* (Glacial Movements) has a brooding menace, honed through guitar and electronics. Track one *Sibericum* is an escalating, harmonic hum, decorated with static; *Massiliensis* is a slightly busier replicating figure, an ominous depiction of the growth of a millennia-old microscopic predator creeping closer to us after climate change.

Following the sad passing of Stars Of The Lid's **Brian McBride**, his partner Adam Wiltzie carries on with his debut solo record *Eleven Fugues For Sodium Pentothal* (Kranky). Referencing a fast-acting anaesthetic, Wiltzie's work is deep, soulful and understandably elegiac, grounded in gorgeous ambient guitar and keys tones with foley textures such as weather in haunting pieces like *Tissue Of Lies*. Masterful classical ambient.

Essex harp and synth duo **Masal**'s *The Galloping Cat* (Sonic Cathedral) brings Anatolian sounds and fuzzy beats to richly textured psychedelic explorations, with input from Ride men Andy Bell and Mark Gardener. The dreamy drone of *Black Beads* balances the plucked Eno space grace of *Gul*, and there are two Broadcast-like impressionistic-shimmer standouts, *Baked Smile* and *Dokuz*.

TRIFECTA

The New Normal KSCOPE

Steven Wilson band veterans leave normal far behind.

Mutant vegetables, schizophrenic spoken word passages, and a didgeridoo bump into each other on the second album from the genre-warping trio of Nick Beggs, Adam Holzman and Craig Blundell. Musically speaking, *The New Normal* picks up from 2021's *Fragments*, offering listeners a high-spirited blend of groovy fusion and experimental prog delivered in easily digestible bite-sized servings. Where most albums in the fusion world tend to

> **There's never a danger of an idea outstaying its welcome.**

feature longer tracks that allow plenty of time for expansive soloing, there's a clear sense of discipline here. While *The New Normal* is a double album for those experiencing it on vinyl, the tracks are the length of pop songs, barely stretching over four minutes for the very longest song. Consequently, there's never any danger of an idea outstaying its welcome or a musical motif being dissected until any trace of the original melody has long since vanished.

What's noticeably different this time compared to *Fragments* is the greater prominence of Beggs's voice. The majority of the music remains instrumental, yet Beggs sings several tunes, bringing a heartfelt tenderness to the ballad *Once Around The Sun*, and a satirical sensibility to *Stupid Pop Song*. The album is punctuated by spoken interludes in which Beggs argues with himself, playing either siblings or perhaps two sides of his own mind, debating who's the better didgeridoo player in *Sibling Rivalry* and trying to escape himself in *What Are You Doing*. There's more surreal humour in *Stroboscopic Fennel* which brings to mind Frank Zappa, Paul Gilbert's 2012's album *Vibrato*, or some of Stewart Copeland's wackier compositions. Like that other prog-fusion power trio The Aristocrats, Trifecta often walks in the footsteps of Zappa, marrying a knack for catchy hooks and an enthusiasm for songcraft with prodigious technical ability and a sense of the absurd, qualities evidenced in tracks like *Ornamental Lettuce* and the slinky *Kleptocrat*.

Theo Travis guests on *Daddy Long Legs*, although it's not the most compelling tune, while Alex Lifeson's presence on *Once Around The Sun* is distinctly understated. More engaging are the tips of the hat to some of the group's musical forebears; *Beck And Call* is a tribute to the late guitar genius with Holzman capturing Beck's sinuous lead style, *Bach Stabber* taps into Johann Sebastian's enthusiasm for Baroque minor keys, while *On The Spectrum* looks towards Billy Cobham's funky fusion. The humorous interludes may prove divisive; certainly, the album sounds strongest when the trio dig hard into a groove on the funkier tunes and showcase the music rather than the comedy.

DAVID WEST

CALEB LANDRY JONES

Hey Gary, Hey Dawn SACRED BONES

Hollywood hotshot delivers great psych-pop-prog album.

Caleb Jones is something of a renaissance man. As an award-winning actor, he's appeared in everything from *Breaking Bad* and *X-Men: First Class* to *Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*. He's also released three rather good albums of psych-tinged art-pop.

Hey Gary, Hey Dawn makes four. Less a vanity side project and more a labour of love, the multi-instrumentalist has abandoned the widescreen and more ambient work of his previous albums into an altogether more streamlined and distilled set of songs – only one tune goes over the five-minute mark, though every song here is brimming with ideas.

Enlisting the talents of over 20 musicians, including a string quartet, it zips from erratic, rowdy country *He Sued His Wife* to a song like *Corn Mine*, which conjures up the ghosts of a whimsical Bolan and early Bowie. Equally, there's hints of vintage Roxy Music and The Velvet Underground in the strident *The Pageant Thieves*. Roxy also echo through *Your Favorite Song* before it turns off towards a hinterland somewhere between Syd Barrett-era Pink Floyd and the doomier end of Nirvana. Nothing, it seems, it's out of bounds, and it's all the better for it. **PW**

OU

II: Frailty INSIDEOUTMUSIC

Devin Townsend-assisted prog metal perfection from China.

Following such a jaw-dropping debut as 2022's *One* should be a challenge, but Beijing's OU have made it look easy. *II: Frailty* was co-produced by Devin Townsend, someone who knows a bit about building worlds of sound.

The result is a mind-bending voyage through highly evolved tech metal, kaleidoscopic post-rock and several things that we don't have names for yet. Intuitively adventurous and shrouded in futuristic reverb, songs like *Frailty*, *Purge* (which features a cameo from Townsend) and *Yyds* are thrillingly alien, as rhythms swirl amid heaving maelstroms of math-metal guitar and bubbling electronics. Throughout, vocalist Lynn Wu negotiates complex, angular melodies that soar, swoop and shimmer, making sense of each disarming squall of experimental madness.

There are moments when metallic elements are reduced to a spectral presence, as Wu's angelic entreaties float in voluptuous ambience: the delicate *Redemption*, the riff-driven *Spirit Broken*, and hypnotic, Laurie Anderson-esque a capella *Recall* are staggeringly beautiful. Fresh and wonderfully peculiar, *II: Frailty* offers an ever-expanding fractal of musical ingenuity and fearlessness. **DL**

LAURI PORRA

Matter And Time PLATOON

Life, the universe and everything – plus Stephen Fry to narrate it.

Power metal fans might have previously seen a battle-jacketed Lauri Porra striking a stadium rock pose in Helsinki power metal group Stratovarius. He also happens to be the great-grandson of Finnish composer – and national hero – Sibelius.

An accomplished multi-instrumentalist, Porra has written for orchestras since 2015 and his 2018 cello concerto, *Entropia*, was a point of origin for *Matter And Time*. Bagging Stephen Fry to narrate leading astronomer Esko Valtaoja's script opens up the listener base for this ambitious concept piece – conducted by Porra's wife Dalia Stasevska – which uses modern classical, psychedelia and pop to tell the story of the universe and humankind. His great-grandad's DNA sweeps into the string-driven Romanticism of *Evolution* and *Consciousness*, which flow seamlessly into the drum and bass euphoria of *The Fall Of Man* and *Future*'s rave.

With Vantaa Orchestra powering the engine room, the work is galvanised by experimental improviser Ringa Manner's voice. From delicate and demure to yearning, powerful and primal, it's standing ovations all round by the tumultuous end. **JK**

QUANTUM

Down The Mountainside BLACK LODGE

Standout collection from hard-hitting yet crafty Swedish quartet.

The debut album from this group of exceptionally talented Swedes, while heavily influenced by such prog-metal heavyweights as Dream Theater and Haken, also demonstrates a deftness of touch, vocal melody constructions and the artful accessibility found in the work of the likes of Frost* and under-appreciated fellow Swedes, A.C.T.

Opener *The Hivemind And The Cockroach* displays the band's penchant for marrying heavy chord work to skittering riffing, while throwing in light, spacious quasi-classical interludes. *On The Verge* introduces a funky twist to proceedings while big, sweeping choruses crop up in *Down The Mountainside, Pt 1*. With both drummer Marcus Lundberg and bassist Anton Ericsson credited with vocals, it's hard to know exactly who is taking the lead on most of the songs, but the vocal work throughout is beautifully designed.

They are occasionally playful – the jazzy breakdown in *Moths & Leaves* provides a shrewd counterpoint to the dark melancholy that proceeds it and the frenetic guitar soloing that follows it. A highly accomplished collection. **GMM**

RPWL

True Live Crime GENTLE ART OF MUSIC/SOULFOOD

Neo-prog veterans prove their pedigree in Holland.

Since *Beyond Man And Time* in 2012, RPWL have established a tradition of following a studio album with a live record. Released as a double CD, double vinyl and Blu-ray, *True Live Crime* sees the German four-piece play 2023's *Crime Scene* in full, before exploring their back catalogue.

Recorded at The Poppodium Boerderij in Zoetermeer, the Netherlands, the sound is faultless. Kalle Wallner's guitar has substance and power while bassist Markus Grützner, who joined in 2022, shows his chops while trading licks with Wallner in *King Of The World*. Yogi Lang isn't the sort of frontman to indulge in showboating, but he possesses a warm tone and never hits a duff note.

The core quartet is augmented by Butsch Keys on keyboards and vocalists Caroline von Brünken and Carmen Tannich. The two extra voices really thicken the richness of the sound, showcased in the almost choral arrangement of the excellent *Victim Of Desire*. Other highlights include the sombre *Life In A Cage* and the shifting moods of *A New World*, from the punchy guitar riff to funky electric piano. RPWL don't put a foot wrong – this is slick, confident, and classy. **DW**

RYUICHI SAKAMOTO

Monster: Original Soundtrack COMMMONS

Typically tender score from Sakamoto's swansong days.

For the Hirokazu Kore-eda film *Kaibutsu (Monster)*, the late Ryuichi Sakamoto delivered a mix of new material and tracks from his 2023 release *12*, which was technically his last full original album (and his first in six years). The typically unflustered, gentle electronica, securely one of his career trademarks, flows along serenely here, as do sparser rivulets led by minimalist piano-note motifs. He has always, on his solo work, visited emotional landscapes which are more concerned with the resonances of single trees than busy forests. With hindsight, the music from *12* was his musings on mortality, his *Blackstar* or *You Want It Darker*.

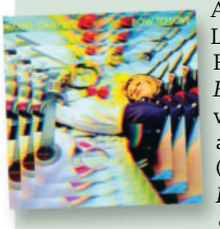
The compositions he created for *Monster* are equally zen, and a man who knew and loved his Chopin of course eschews any grandstanding. It's music as made by an artist who believes understatement is the cornerstone of dignity, operating in the same currents as did Harold Budd. The sibling tracks incongruously (if rationally) called *Monster 1* and *Monster 2* are like listening to raindrops tap the windowpane while one is in a place of warm shelter. It sounds as if Sakamoto, in his final weeks, was in that kind of zone. **CR**

PSYCHEDELIC PROG

Take a trip with **Rob Hughes** as he seeks out the latest mind-expanding music.

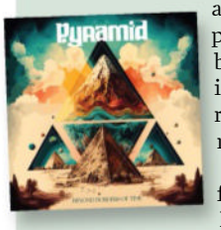
Spearheading a new kind of pagan folk revival in her native Cornwall, **Daisy Rickman** offers an elemental take on seasonal and celestial shifts with *Howl* (Weird Walk). Named after the Cornish word for sun, the album finds the young artist, filmmaker and musician expertly handling various instruments — 12-string guitar, double bass, cello, bouzouki and synths among them — to create a thoroughly beguiling set of psychedelic folk songs, nourished by deep, earthy tones that recall Nico in her solo prime.

Relative veteran **Isobel Campbell** has come a long way since her Belle & Sebastian days, having explored all things Americana with the late, great Mark Lanegan and, more recently, sung in French with Jérôme Didelot. The exquisite *Bow To Love* (Cooking Vinyl) is burnished with lots of subtle detail as she navigates a winding path through dream-folk (*Dopamine*), baroque psychedelia (*Do Or Die*; *Saturday's Son*) and hushed electronica (*Take This Poison*).



Further afield, Stockholm quartet **Les Big Byrd** expand their remit with real panache on fourth effort *Diamonds, Rhinestones And Hard Rain* (Chimp Limbs). Frontman and leader Jocke Åhlund, previously of Swedish cult heroes Caesars and Teddybears, appears to have fully embraced 70s kosmische (particularly Cluster and Harmonia) on longform epic *Mareld* and the 12-minute *The Night Bus*, the latter sprinkled with weird effects, wah-wah guitar and jazzy sax. The title track veers into cosmic rock territory, with Åhlund sounding not unlike Ozzy Osbourne in his formative Black Sabbath days.

A more sustained inquiry into space rock is provided by German power trio **Pyramid**. Second album *Beyond Borders Of Time* (Subsound) consists of seven instrumentals that, as the title suggests, travel far and free, powered by distorted guitar fuzz, thick bass and tireless drums. The whole effect is unnervingly claustrophobic, from the riff-heavy *Krypta* to open-ended eight-minute jam *Fainting*.



Equally punishing is *Hard Copy* (Dais), from LA's **VR Sex**. The latest project from Drab Majesty's Andrew Clinco, better known as a keen proponent of rumbling shoegaze, the emphasis here is on lawless post-punk with acid-rock overtones. Under the alias Noel Skum, Clinco plays up his delinquent role on belligerent tunes like *Dictionary Talk* and *Real Doll Time*, while *Squid Row* and *Jenny Killer Glue* showcase an evident fondness for spiky psych pop.

Occupying an entirely different realm, meanwhile, is **Wave Arising**. *(The) Rooted Sky* (Ransom Note) couples Scottish techno pioneer and Spiral Tribe member Sebastian Vaughan with Kynsie, a dancer/video maker of Reunionese and Ivorian heritage. The duo aim to reach higher levels of consciousness through kinetic electronica, ambient shimmer, hard polyrhythmic beats and cinematic modern psychedelia. Trippy? Oh yes.

WHEEL

Charismatic Leaders INSIDEOUTMUSIC

Prog metallers unshackle themselves from Tool comparisons.

In *Prog* 148, Wheel bandleader James Lascelles assured readers that the Anglo-Finnish trio's fourth album is heavier and weirder than its predecessors, so it's pleasing that such a weighty promise has been kept. The loose concept of *Charismatic Leaders* explores various cults of personalities, from media oligarchs to politicians and beyond.

> **Wheel sound far more like themselves and less like anyone else.**

Since 2021 album *Resident Human*, Lascelles says he has seen these figures have an increasingly influential role on society, and his blend of fascination with and hatred of them steers the record's emotional turbulence. *Empire* is a hyper-aggressive opener aimed at the Rupert Murdoch dynasty. Admittedly, it cuts very close to the bone of 2019's *Vultures*, albeit at a more accelerated pace, but it's entertaining nevertheless. A powerful one-note breakdown delivers a strong finale, but it won't be until the second track, *Porcelain*, that fans of more intricate and less metallic songwriting will start to be won over. There's a deep, blooming tonality to its clean guitars, while Lascelles' floating vocals offer a fine juxtaposition to the rattling bass which lurks beneath.

Since the start of their career, Wheel have struggled to shake off Tool comparisons, but here, they sound far more like themselves and less like anyone else. Naturally, hints of their lineage remain. However, they're far rarer and part of a much more widescreen picture when, during *Submission*'s frenetic closing stages and *Discipline*'s bass-led intro, they do emerge. As such, this feels like a breakthrough moment for the band. After the eastern acoustic guitars of prelude *Caught In The Afterglow*, the trio pull their final card, and by far their most ambitious play to date. *The Freeze* is about watching disaster unfold miles away from you and feeling powerless in being able to do anything about it, and its opening chord progression is aptly chilling. Clean guitars, wavered with some gentle effects, chime through its spare atmosphere with a subtly off-kilter pulse.

Porcelain takes the opposite tack, the rhythm section adding to instead of opposing its delicacy as it ever so patiently builds. Lascelles sounds deeply connected to his lyrics along the way, crooning *'What did you hope to find? Earth below, youth behind'* with its undercurrent of instrumentals growing more agitated during each repeat. It takes half of its nearly 11-minute playtime to get out of third gear and the string-bending riff, which follows feels suitably gigantean as a result. An atonal, jazz-twisted solo then takes its place as the band end the record in prolific and profound fashion. It's one that will likely silence many of their longstanding critics, and possibly convert some too.

PHIL WELLER

SON OF MAN

Gaslight ESOTERIC

Third album from the last vestiges of one of Wales's greatest exports.

Son Of Man started as a loving tribute to Man, and it's inevitable that they'll always be under the shadow of Deke Leonard's original band. The apple might not fall from the tree initially, but there's no overlooking the clear blue water between Son Of Man's latest album and such Man classics as *Rhinos, Winos and Lunatics* or *The Welsh Connection*. Admittedly, few albums stand well in comparison against the invention and sheer lunacy of those two records, but anyone coming here expecting the mad majesty of the past will be disappointed. Less prog and more rock in this latest incarnation, and with a vocalist in the excellent Richie Galloni who carries a note like Ian Gillan most likely wishes he still could, their musical flourishes are more mainstream than Man's famous wig-outs – it's all very far from a song such as *Scotch Corner*. That said, the choppy *Far From Home*, the soaring and sublime *Tomorrow* (Dave Gilmour sound-alike solo and all) and the excellent *Thanks For The Ride* (which is Boston, if they'd come via Builth Wells) is a tremendous crescendo to the record. It's just a pity they haven't pushed the experimental envelope further. **PW**

SYNCATTO

Fiction SYNCATTO.BANDCAMP.COM

Artificial Language guitarist mixes melody and virtuosity on latest solo album.

Instrumental guitar music is no longer about what players can do, but rather how they do it in a listenable context. The solo project of Artificial Language's Charlie Robbins, *Fiction* is the fourth album as Syncatto and it never lets Robbins' talents blemish his songwriting.

A feverish blend of dazzling melodies and outrageous chops, his mix of prog, classical and metal styles no longer feels experimental. The title track offers angular rhythms, gliding motifs and thoughtful nylon guitar before *Afterglow* impresses with infectious salsa grooves and *Sword* unleashes a 96-second masterclass in art-rock weirdness. *Nightfall*, meanwhile, is underscored by a slaloming groove and a gorgeous riff that sounds like stones skimming across water.

Robbins enlists Dream Theater's Jordan Rudess for a romantic piano solo in the midst of *Midnight*'s shred whirlwind. On *Prestige*, Arch Echo guitarists Adam Rafowitz and Adam Bentley inject jazzy guitars, and Coen Strouken adds elegant violins to the classy-yet-dark *Black Velvet*, yet Robbins always shines brightest. *Fiction* is a rare example of a prog album it's possible to dance to, and that's a wonderful thing. **POW**

THE UTOPIA STRONG

The BBC Sessions ROCKET RECORDINGS

Tangerine Dream-like soundscapes from the kosmische-emulating modular trio.

Modular synthesisers are unpredictable by their nature, so put three in a room together and anything could happen. The Utopia Strong – the unlikely union between Gong's Kavus Torabi, snooker legend Steve Davis and Coil/Teleplasmiste member Michael J York – have spent the last six years harnessing these refractory waves, becoming expert sonic cosmonauts working collectively in the dispensation of the psychedelic.

This recording of a session for Radio 6 Music's Marc Riley at the BBC's Maida Vale studios doesn't differ too much from a studio album for the trio, given that more or less everything is improvised in either case. And yet the sense of occasion is not lost on them. The *BBC Sessions* artwork is a loving recreation of the legendary *Peel Sessions* of yore, while *Miniature Citadels* and the epic *The Tower Is Blocked* expand the sonic palette, boldly going where no World Snooker Champion has gone before. The latter track, in particular, floats beatifically on ambient oscillations before a surging sequencer bass drives a coach and horses through the serenity, and a disruptive bass drum kicking in at the six-and-a-half minute mark finishes the job. **JA**

VANDEN PLAS

The Empyrean Equation Of The Long Lost Things FRONTIERS

A familiar yet captivating journey from the veteran prog metal group.

Vanden Plas reigned for 30 years as one of Germany's premier progressive metal acts, and, as their cryptically titled 11th album shows, they're not about to give up their throne yet.

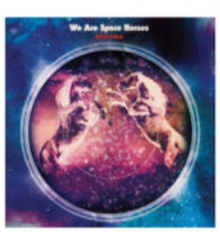
The Empyrean Equation Of The Long Lost Things (try saying that after three pints) upholds their characteristic mix of soaring hooks and complex but engrossing instrumentation. Frenetic rocker *My Icarian Flight* and symphonic ballad *They Call Me* highlight vocalist Andy Kuntz's powerful mix of aggression and emotion. His bandmates remain as capable as ever, too, filling multipart gems *The Empyrean Equation Of The Long Lost Things* and *March Of The Saints* – which bookend the record – with a balance of poignancy and power (including dynamic percussion and flashy guitarwork, as well as soothing synths).

Those tracks also share one of the group's most alluring melodies since 2006's *Christ 0*. Even the relatively generic *Sanctimonarium* is enjoyable enough to not damper the experience, and although Vanden Plas largely rely on a tried-and-true formula here, it works so well that it's difficult to fault them for it. **JMB**

WE ARE SPACE HORSES

Apologia WEARESPACEHORSES.BANDCAMP.COM

New England trio impress with stimulating space rock debut.



Like an astronomer discovering some previously unnoticed celestial body lurking out in the dark reaches between the galaxies, it's exciting to encounter a bright new prospect in space rock in the form of Massachusetts trio We Are Space Horses. Although singer and guitarist Kevin Vanderhoof, bassist Gabbi Vanderhoof, and drummer Eric Hochwald like to get cosmic, they aren't one-trick space ponies. They tap into a Canterbury-style mix of psych and folk on *To Let Go... Absolutely* and move into post-rock for the slow-burn droning guitar riff of *Stale Skies*.

Vanderhoof's bass positively growls through *God Is A Ghost*, *Haunt* is a dense slab of space rock, expansive in scope but always grooving and melodic, while *Justification To Build A Monument* exudes a profoundly mournful yet compelling sense of gloom. The layered vocals of *Ketoacidosis* return to that psychedelic vibe, filtered through a 90s alternative rock prism.

The strength of this debut should hopefully draw more attention to the trio and it's intriguing to wonder where their explorations will lead them next. Giddy up, space horsey. **DW**

JO BETH YOUNG

Broken Spells WISE QUEEN RECORDS

Prog-folk artist formerly known as RISE is born again.

Jo Beth Young has been on quite a journey, from lifelong pagan with non-dualistic beliefs to born again Christian. *Broken Spells* was written alongside this seismic spiritual change and, while it doesn't all directly reflect the passage, the songs radiate a sense of constant questing and challenge. So opener *Wolf Song* can address issues of narcissistic abuse, *Lazuli* can paint a soldier being sent to war on the back of deceit and *Adversity* can speak of spiritual warfare, all bound within the same broad spell-breaking theme.

Young's crystalline vocals are the focal point. Emotive and ethereal, they soar and lull in equal measure. The singer also turns her hand to various instruments from bowed guitars to synths, with help from guests including Peter Yates (Fields Of The Nephilim) on guitar and Ben Roberts (Silver Moth) on cello. There are loops of skittering electronica that recall the slumbering ghost of Portishead, while elsewhere they float through dreamy prog-folk arrangements and sombre pre-dawn laments. The result is a diverse and captivating album that encourages full immersion and sends the listener on their own guided journey of discovery. **PT**

AND LAST BUT NOT LEAST

Grant Moon has a rummage down the back of the *Prog* sofa for the ones that nearly got away...

Sea Of Hopeless Angels (markusreuter.com) is the 'spontaneous collaboration' from **Markus Reuter** and **Stefano Castagna**. Touch guitar expert Reuter (Stick Men, Crimson ProjeKt) needs little introduction in these parts, and here his former mixer Castagna steps up to a compositional role, having written some grand yet sensitive ambient backing for Reuter's cerebral, fretwork. The mood is reflective and restrained on this haunting, oblique work.

Dublin's **Nebularis** go all in on their none-more-prog metal debut *Exodus — Shattered Earth Saga — Part I* (nebularis.bandcamp.com). The album cover and songtitles (*Voyager, Holocene, Tellurian*) tell the tale: this is a heavy, melodic sci-fi trip with a story, about humans traversing the galaxy in search of a new home among the stars). With meaty riffs from central musician Mó Sheerin, throat-shredding, hooky melodies from vocalist Hytham and a solid unity of music and lyrical theme, *Exodus* is big, promising stuff.

Four albums into the game, Belgium's heavy and grandly earnest **Transport Aerian** proffer *Live In Ghent* (Melodic Revolution). The concert album draws on their growing catalogue, including 2021 album *Skywound* (*Shall Not Be* might be them at their best) and *Darkblue*. Vocalist Hamlet (no surname here, just an apparent love of Shakespeare) has a passionate, quasi-operatic voice that won't be to everyone's tastes, but while this may not be the sharpest recording, his band's commitment and confidence shine through.

Ozymandias Eye is a solo project from guitarist/bassist Jorge Jácome of Mexican proggers Alpha Lighting System. *Fear Plague* (ozymandiaseye.bandcamp.com) features vocalist Victor Valdovinos Romero, whose range runs from Cookie Monster growls to Matt Bellamy melodics and James Hetfield rasps. He, Jácome and band wield some pleasingly dense, crunchy, widdly prog metal here (*Trial Of Survival*, *Dreadhorde Invasion*). If the album's ostensible sci-fi narrative is lost in the distorted miasma, that's probably by design.

On his previous albums Buckingham's **Rod While** proved himself to be a deft guitarist and talented producer. *Integrity* (rodwhile.bandcamp.com) is another serving of tasteful six-string and sleek electro and string arrangements. While laments the decline of that titular quality in public life, his point illustrated by soundbites from recent British politicians on *Radical Lies* and *Control*, complete with an audio collage of Brexit rhetoric and sheep sounds. Meaningful, rueful, and quietly angry, *Integrity* could be his best yet.

Finally, *Intourist* (Melodic Revolution) is the likeable, uplifting follow-up to *Decoupage*, the 2021 debut from **Refestramus**. Chicago-based drummer Derek Ferguson returns with another accomplished team of sessioneers (including Moon Men's Jerry King on bass) to serve a home-cooked slice of melody-rich prog. It's pure 70s retro pastiche and the smile on its face is infectious.

CARL PALMER

Fanfare For The Common Man BMG

Celebration of a far from common progressive rock progenitor.

One of the most influential and innovative drummers of his generation and a founder member of not just Emerson, Lake & Palmer, but of proto-proggers Atomic Rooster and chart-topping 80s AOR powerhouse Asia, Carl Palmer's long and often extraordinary career is covered here by three CDs of music, a Blu-ray "scrap book" documentary, and a 200-page autobiography.

An overview of his contribution to the art of the drummer.

The tracklisting of the first two CDs is almost identical to the 2001 anthology *Do Ya Wanna Play, Carl?*. Beyond the iconic *Karn Evil 9: 1st Impression, Part 2*, the first disc is mostly concerned with ELP's instrumental output either adapted from or influenced by classical and orchestral music. It focuses on Palmer's percussive contributions, including *Bullfrog, Tank* and the inspired version of Aaron Copland's *Fanfare For The Common Man*. There's the radical interpretation of Alberto Ginastera's *Toccata* from *Brain Salad Surgery* and the 20-minute *Concerto For Percussion*, co-written by Palmer and composer Joseph Horovitz, bumped from ELP's *Works, Vol 1* due to lack of space.

The second disc fills in gaps around the ELP years with mid- to late-60s psychedelic pop and British blues/rock curios from the likes of The Craig, Chris Farlowe and Atomic Rooster. Palmer's appearance on Mike Oldfield's *Mount Teidi* from 1982 gets an airing, as do four tracks representing the slick prog-pop of Asia with *Heat Of The Moment* a reminder of quite what a potent force the band was. Cuts from Palmer's collaboration with Keith Emerson and Robert Berry (aka 3) mark a rekindling of the spirit of ELP in the late 80s and *Shawnee* demonstrates Palmer's jazz credentials jamming with the Buddy Rich Big Band at Ronnie Scott's in 1986.

Disc three brings us almost up to date with live versions of many ELP classics like *Trilogy* and *Hoedown* from the Carl Palmer Band and ELP Legacy shows recorded between 2002 and 2016, alongside their interpretations of other familiar compositions such as a rocking *Carmina Burana* and channelling The Nice with Bernstein's *America*. It's exceptional stuff with Palmer a whirlwind of energy and Emerson and Lake's parts covered by the stunning virtuosic performances of a guitarist/bassist duo, latterly the youthful pairing of Paul Bielatowicz and Simon Fitzpatrick.

As an overview of more than six decades of music-making and Palmer's contribution to the art of the drummer, there's no questioning the quality of this collection. However, given it's largely a reissue of an earlier release with added video content and Palmer's autobiography, whether it's truly essential is a different matter.

GARY MACKENZIE

FAUST

Momentaufnahme III BUREAU B

Experimental icons unearth more golden off-cuts.

Left to their own devices by Virgin boss Richard Branson, Faust were an unstoppable creative force at their own Wümme studio in Bremen between 1971 and 1974. Following on from *Momentaufnahme I* and *II*, this is a third compendium of curios, off-cuts and alternate versions, culled from the same period. Fans of *Faust*, *Faust So Far* and *The Faust Tapes* will be familiar with some of this material, but there's plenty here to sustain and even expand the myth of the Germans' feverish mission to reconstruct rock music for a new era.

Firmly in the spirit of 1973's collage-style *The Faust Tapes* in particular, *Momentaufnahme III* contains a few previously released tracks alongside numerous unheard chunks of sonic mischief. Faust were clearly having a fantastic time at Wümme, and their infectious enthusiasm for bucking the sonic system remains an invigorating delight. Following the none-more-krautrock clattering of *Giggy Smile* (which first surfaced on 1973's *Faust IV*), *Don't Take Roots* is the key moment here. An obtuse splurge of cut-up dialogue, electronic shrapnel and tripped-out instrumentals, it spells out the Faust ethos as clearly as it will allow. Similarly, an alternate version of *Läuft... Heisst Das Es Läuft Oder Es Kommt Bald... Läuft* (also from *Faust IV*), here retitled *Psalter*, captures the band in a mantra-like state, lost in a world of subversive possibilities. Elsewhere, minute-long oddities *Ma Trompette* and *Schwindebeck I* and *II* add peripheral colour to longer, more traditional pieces like *Baby* (psych rock with no brakes) and *Meer* (a Satie-esque ambient dreamscape). *Momentaufnahme III* ends with three BBC session tracks, including a riotous version of the mighty *Krautrock* itself: 11 minutes of trance-like, anti-trad freewheeling that indirectly invented everything from Suicide to minimalist techno.

More of a worthwhile adjunct to the classics than a cohesive album in itself, this deep dive into one of music's most unknowable entities is full to the brim with weird science. **DL**

ANTHONY PHILLIPS

Strings Of Light CHERRY RED

Phillips' 2019 celebration of string-driven things revisited.

When *Strings Of Light* came out in 2019 it was Anthony Phillips' first album in seven years, following the 12th instalment of his *Private Parts & Pieces* series in 2012. While most of the tracks were new, he'd found himself revisiting ideas from his old band Genesis, and had dug even further back to his formative guitar-playing days – when he'd listen to The Byrds, George Harrison and a hippie Charterhouse friend, Tony Henderson.

The sound of the 12-string guitar is one of the defining features of Genesis, and something that schoolmates Phillips and Mike Rutherford had become obsessed with. Phillips and Rutherford studied every trick and technique and created their own mannerisms through experimentation with tunings, chord inversions and so on. When Phillips left Genesis in 1970 his 12-string reverberation imprint remained. Steve Hackett would arrive and take up the mantle.

Phillips' songs and deft fingerstyle continue to be influential today – Big Big Train's Gregory Spawton has cited Phillips as an inspiration many times – so *Strings Of Light* is a handy reminder of why he's so revered as a player, as well as tickling the ear with some pleasurable sounds, such as *Jour De Fete*'s mandolin vivacity, the divine, nine-note chord thrum of *Diamond Meadows* and the Vivaldi-esque *Winter Lights*.

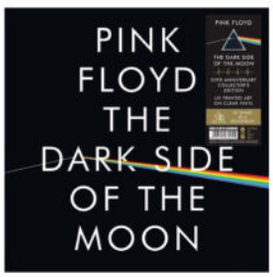
Amid the chiming strums and flourishes, Phillips' humour peeps through just once, in the warped, scratchy, boogie-woogie of *Mouse Trip*, and there are avant-garde vignettes such as the ominous, destructive clang of *Into The Void* and the Ligeti-like, atmospheric *Tale Ender*.

"I never thought of my playing as particularly brilliant," the ever-modest Phillips told *Prog* in 2019. We respectfully disagree; here's a man who loves the form and uses it in melodic and moving ways to great effect. Check stunning closer *Life Story* – played on a 1931 classical guitar made by legendary Barcelonan luthier Francisco Simplicio – for proof. **JK**

PINK FLOYD

The Dark Side Of The Moon: Collector's Edition PARLOPHONE

The Pink Floyd reissue industry rolls relentlessly on.



How much is too much? Over the last year, Pink Floyd fans have been able to celebrate the 50th anniversary of *The Dark Side Of The Moon* by purchasing a luxury deluxe box set, a separate Blu-ray Atmos version (included in the above, but with a different cover for collectors), 180g remastered double-vinyl LP and CD sets (ditto, but without the cover). Then there's the *The Dark Side Of The Moon: Live At Wembley* album, the lavish hardback photobook and Roger Waters' own sunset-of-my-years take on the original album. Money. It's a gas, right?

Worry not, Floyd die-hards, because here's another expensive version of *TDSOTM* to lighten the wallet. The USP this time is that it comes in the form of two clear single-sided vinyl LPs, each with a visually impressive glow-up, with the non-playing sides each featuring a UV-printed *Dark Side* image, namely the prism and the heartbeat graphic from inside the original cover and gatefold respectively. Does it cast new light on the album? Not in the slightest.

What else does it offer? A slipcase featuring a different, typographical cover, because the original just isn't iconic enough. Plus a poster, because that's what everyone who can afford the £60-odd for this edition wants. Sadly, there's no replacement needle for anyone who knackers theirs by accidently playing the wrong side of the vinyl LPs (guaranteed to happen at least once).

That the original album is immaculate goes without saying – an elegant, moving, sometimes unsettling existential treatise from a band vibrating with ideas. The new mix sounds incredible too (though 'new' is relative, given it's the same mix from the 2023 box set). And of course, none of this is mandatory – Floyd fans can happily live with the 2016 remastered edition, or the 2011 Immersion Box, or the 2003 30th Anniversary Edition, or whichever of the 1,300-plus versions listed on Discogs they already own. Just remember to start saving for the 60th-anniversary blow-out when it rolls around in 2033. **DEV**

STACKRIDGE

The Forbidden City ESOTERIC

Two-CD/one-DVD set of the West Country's finest live in 2007.

"This is the first song played at the very first Glastonbury Festival in 1969 by a band called Stackridge. Or was it 1970? Anyway, it was in Doncaster," says James Warren, introducing *Teatime* on this full concert from the Bath Rondo. The song's yearning verse melody and vocal harmonies unfold over picked guitar, flute and violin – the latter by Rachel Hall, later of Big Big Train – is redolent of early Genesis. It then expands into a freewheeling instrumental conclusion. If Stackridge had kept exploring this avenue, they would have been easier to classify, but their love of The Beatles, Incredible String Band, Yes, Zappa and music hall, and their surreal and observational lyrics, produced all manner of curious diversions.

But that which made them so remarkable mitigated against their commercial success. They built a reputation as a live band in the 70s and when they reformed in the late 90s they were just as good, as demonstrated here. With their last album, *A Victory For Common Sense*, still in the works, *The Forbidden City* looks back to their 70s heyday, with a few songs from 1999's comeback album *Something For The Weekend* and the airbrushed, melancholic pop of splinter group, The Korgis' 1979 hit, *Everybody's Got To Learn Sometime*.

With the benefit of hindsight, their music makes more sense now. *The Volunteer* is like a traditional army recruitment song via *Carry On Sergeant*, and *The Road To Venezuela* was inspired by Bing Crosby and Bob Hope's *Road To...* movies and was initially conceived as a part of an abandoned concept album about South America. There's the would-be dance craze *Do The Stanley*, *Friendliness* with its *Abbey Road* harmonies, and folky pop of *Dora The Female Explorer*. The highlight is the multipart, sitar-infused *Syracuse The Elephant* with its pay-off line '*Now he lives in Hollywood with Tarzan and Jane*'. Its mixture of invention, daftness and majesty sums up the band. Or at least comes close. **MB**

RENAISSANCE

Tuscany ESOTERIC

Early-2000s reunion set reissued with live bonus discs.

Seeing news of much-loved bands reforming is about as commonplace now as fact-checking Donald Trump's speeches, but in the late 90s, when many a once-cherished progressive-leaning act had moved on from the diminishing commercial returns they were experiencing to launch solo projects, supergroups or salmon farms, it was a rarer occurrence.

> **The material on this remastered version sounds revitalised.**

So, fans of folk prog luminaries Renaissance would have been excited by the news, back in 1998, that Annie Haslam, Michael Dunford, John Tout and Terry Sullivan — the core of the early 70s line-up from their prog-leaning peak — were sharing a stage again for the first time in 18 years.

The fruits of their reunion arrived in 2001 with help from friend of the band and Haslam's erstwhile paramour Roy Wood, and the material on this remastered version of the album sounds revitalised. Even if the production is a little synthetic at times, tracks such as the hymnal, haunting *Lady From Tuscany* and the string-soaked *Dolphins Prayer* make for proud additions to the band's repertoire. They also seem to retain touches of their old symphonic ambition, as on the orchestrally enhanced romantic paean *In The Sunshine* and the Latin-infused *Life In Brazil*, even if that latter experiment isn't entirely successful, and the galloping pace and anaemic horns of *The Race* are also unconvincing.

Perhaps as prominent a selling point of this three-CD set will be the inclusion of a Japanese live set from 2001, released the following year as *In The Land Of The Rising Sun*. Here, Haslam is in strident voice reprising early gems such as *Carpet Of The Sun*, offset by shimmering acoustic chords from Dunford, and those fans who stayed on board for the broader folk-pop delights of the band's later albums will still find the Top 10 hit *Northern Lights* irresistible. It's followed here with a cover of Mike Oldfield's *Moonlight Shadow*, resembling nothing more than a Renaissance hit that should have been.

More substantial pleasures are in store for fans of the band's mid-70s incarnation, in the shape of the floating, 10-minute exploration of their Solzhenitsyn tribute *Mother Russia*, which makes for a wonderfully immersive opening to the third disc, followed by the intoxicatingly slow-building post-psychedelic reverie *Trip To The Fair*.

They arguably venture too far into prog indulgence on *Ashes Are Burning*, however, as it's extrapolated into a 19-minute suite thanks to a lengthy fretless bass solo from new member David Keyes. A rather baffling diversion, but it doesn't distract too much from an invigorating live set from a band who still clearly had a lot to offer.

JOHNNY SHARP

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WARHORSE

The Recordings 1970-1972 ESOTERIC

Remastered back catalogue of Deep Purple/Rick Wakeman-connected group.

Warhorse were one of the many bands at the start of the 1970s looking to combine their psych/rock roots with the emerging progressive sound. However, like The Nice before them, their original role had been as the backing group to an American soul singer, in this instance Marsha Hunt. The key member of the group was Nick Simper, bass player on Deep Purple's first three albums. When Hunt temporarily left the music business, Simper put a new band together from the ashes of the old, with members including ex-Johnny Kidd & The Pirates guitarist Ged Peck and a young, talented keyboard-player called Rick Wakeman. Quickly over-committed, Wakeman left and was replaced by Frank Wilson. The band then signed to new prog imprint Vertigo.

Warhorse defined a sound on their self-titled 1970 debut album that they would pretty much stick to throughout their existence: solid hard rock grooves with progressive-leaning arrangements, topped off with the soulful shouting and screaming of vocalist Ashley Holt.

Opening track *Vulture Blood* is arguably the best thing they ever did, a churchy procession of organ exploding into a funky, head-nodding riff that recalls a spikier Atomic Rooster. There's some moody soundscaping and a bit of drama on tracks such as *No Chance* and *Woman Of The Devil*, with the latter featuring some terrific playing from Peck, while epitomising Holt's regrettable lyrical default. Highlights from 1972's follow-up *Red Sea* include *Back In Time*, its lumbering block riff morphing into a grandstanding, vaguely experimental solo guitar section from Peck replacement Pete Parks. There's also a surprisingly effective version of Shirley Bassey/Tom Jones hit *I (Who Have Nothing)*. But overall, the songs are undercooked and the production is dated.

The bonus demo tracks (all previously available) suggest Warhorse might have had more oats in the bag, but Simper called it a day when Holt and drummer Barney James left to join Wakeman's English Rock Ensemble. **JB**

WHITE WILLOW

Ex Tenebris KARISMA

Norwegian prog luminaries' second LP, out on vinyl for the first time.

First released in 1997, *Ex Tenebris* began life as a solo album by White Willow's guitarist and composer-in-chief Jacob Holm-Lupo. The line-up which made the band's 1995 debut *Ignus Fatuus* had already disbanded, but as *Ex Tenebris* took shape Holm-Lupo realised it had enough prog pedigree to stand as a resurrected White Willow's second album, and now comes this re-release of a cult favourite. Not as lushly arranged than its predecessor, it was recorded on a shoestring, and has since been newly remastered by Holm-Lupo.

Highlights include *A Strange Procession* – which sounds a bit like the *Mastermind* theme tune reworked to soundtrack some unimaginably chilling pagan rite – and spacious, contemplative opener *Leaving The House Of Thanatos*, all bone-dry guitar arpeggios, Mellotron and woody analogue synth. There's a gorgeous, lonely old church feel to *Soteriology*, too, with singer Sylvia Erichsen's beautifully enunciated vocals evoking Sally Oldfield's performance on Steve Hackett's *Shadow Of The Hierophant*.

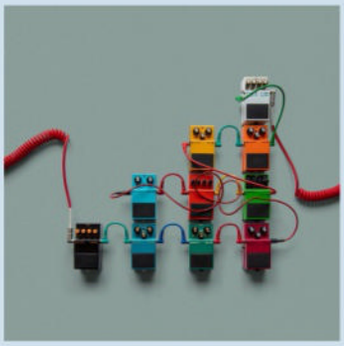
Though *Ex Tenebris* is today billed as White Willow's "first step towards something more original than [their] first album's retro-styled psych-folk", something of *Ignus Fatuus*'s sound and mood remains, but as the bucolic flute on second track *The Book Of Love* underlines, this is very much a good thing. Elsewhere, Holm-Lupo's creamy, treble-rolled-off guitar lead on *Helen & Simon Magus* is unshowy, but effective.

Ex Tenebris translates from the Latin as 'from darkness', and there's no mistaking the dark Scandinavian energy of White Willow's second album, a moody, mellow, sometimes melancholic record that sounds like some kind of salve against (or in places product of) seasonal affective disorder during the long Norwegian winter. Sonically, it's light years away from later works – not least their unlikely 2015 cover of hard rock icons the Scorpions' *Animal Magnetism* – but White Willow's roots are well worth exploring. **JMN**

STEVEN WILSON

Harmonic Divergence SW RECORDS/VIRGIN

Vinyl-only RSD limited-edition remodelling of Wilson's latest.



Surely even the most reactionary now applaud Steven Wilson's constant mission to move his music forward, to be progressive in the sense of opening windows and doors to fresh stimuli rather than merely diligently dusting the museum. This 42-minute remix, or reimagining, of key passages from last year's *The Harmony Codex* again reaches outwards. It's sometimes sublime, sometimes innocuous and always interesting. It's both a personable companion piece to the source and a project of pulsating identity in its own right.

"Sometimes sublime, sometimes innocuous, always interesting."

The original album was already rich in variety. This, a broth stirred by multiple cooks, has phases where the flavours are tastily coaxed out, and others where someone's gone overboard with their preferred spices or herbs. The longer, close-to-10-minutes remixes that bookend the record, by Ewan Pearson and Mogwai, are by far the best, while the Manic Street Preachers remix is misguided. Those by modern jazz musicians David Kollar and Avre Henriksen, and by Wilson's bandmates Craig Blundell and Adam Holzman, are, if unspectacular, north of solid. These are all punctuated by Wilson himself offering brief, linking variations on what he calls *Codex Theme*.

Pearson's elongation of *Time Is Running Out* transforms the track completely. Beginning with a recitation of numbers, it glides into a dance-friendly backbeat, which might be deemed incongruous had Wilson's back catalogue, not least his work with No-Man, heartily embraced such grooves before. It'd be a hoary dinosaur who objected. Tricks flicker in and out as the piece, which pauses to allow Wilson's original song (with its knowing mention of a '*kick inside*') a fleeting cameo, follows its instincts with smooth conviction. Kollar and Henriksen's take on *The Harmony Codex* itself is more restrained, decorating the spoken word with a soundbed, which recalls David Sylvian's *Brilliant Trees* and deploying keening violins. *Actual Brutal Facts*, restyled by Blundell, shifts into the kind of sinister, strangely-lit territory that Peter Gabriel investigated on his second and third albums.

Economies Of Scale, opening the second half, is handled by The Manics in a manner that suggests they had a momentary crush on Andy Summers' guitar sound on deep cuts by The Police. Unfortunately, their ham-fistedness means they miss their target and wind up as Big Country. It's a win for the Scottish over the Welsh as, after Holzman's simmering, reshuffle of *Rock Bottom*, Mogwai bring us back to *The Harmony Codex* track with inspired intensity. They're as serious as a church about it, and it's the no-prisoners climax this album needed. A valid, persuasive revamp.

CHRIS ROBERTS

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MARKET SQUARE MEMORIES: MARILLION 1983

Andy Phillips HANGING AROUND BOOKS

Super-slim volume captures *Script*-era neo-prog giants on the rise.

Even in an age when it's difficult to get change from £100 for tickets to a medium-sized rock gig, £11.95 might still be considered a high price to ask for a black and white, 250-edition, 36-page A5 (roughly half the size of this publication) "photozine". But it's worth what fans will pay for it, and for anyone wishing to invest, former *Time Out* photographer Andy Phillips offers a handful of diverting portraits and behind the scenes shots of Marillion just at the point when they were about to graduate from selling out their hometown venue Aylesbury Friars, to re-establishing and reinventing prog as a creatively vibrant and commercially potent rock genre. The most poignant photo is, perhaps, the one on the cover, which features Fish with his arms around the sole survivor of the band's original Silmarillion line-up, Mick Pointer, just weeks before he and his bandmates made the ruthless (but arguably fair if you've listened to the band's early demos) decision to dismiss the drummer and upgrade to a more accomplished sticksman. Elsewhere, though, the frontman's burgeoning charisma bristles from the pages as he stares down Phillips' lens backstage while applying his trademark face paint. Marketable? Evidently so. **JS**

MAGNUM: ON TRACK

Matthew Taylor SONICBOND PUBLISHING

British pomp rock veterans get the now-posthumous track by track treatment.

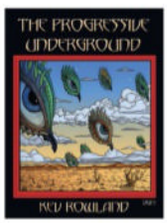
The death of Magnum guitarist Tony Clarkin in January renders this career-spanning analysis of Magnum's weighty back catalogue as much eulogy as celebration. Publishing deadlines meant that Clarkin's passing is only addressed fleetingly at the end of the book, presumably as a last-minute addition, but it's enough to lend a bittersweet edge to it all.

As Taylor points out, they were "grizzled" even when they began their belated rise to fame in the early 80s, looking less like rock stars and more like refugees from an am-dram production of *The Hobbit*. But what they lacked in image, they made up for in class. Taylor correctly identifies Clarkin's songwriting as the beating heart of the band, as they evolve from the "aerie-fairie" flights of fancy of debut album *Kingdom Of Madness*, through such epic 80s masterpieces as *Chase The Dragon* and *On A Storyteller's Night*. He's overly generous to 1990's misguided *Goodnight LA*, though rightly recognises the quiet greatness of some of their post-reunion 21st-century albums. It makes for a nice tribute to band who channelled the spirit of prog, if not always its sound. It's just a shame that the man at the centre of it isn't here to acknowledge it. **DEV**

THE PROGRESSIVE UNDERGROUND VOL 5

Kev Rowland GONZO MULTIMEDIA

Encyclopaedic compendium of reviews continues to grow.



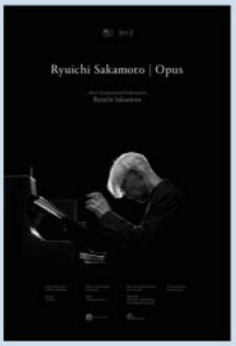
Kev Rowland has been a tireless champion of prog and symphonic rock since the 1980s, and after leaving his role editing *Feedback* magazine to emigrate from the UK to New Zealand in the mid-2000s, he began compiling his writings. *The Progressive Underground* volumes 1-3, covered reviews from 1991-2006, but no reason to stop there, right? Volume 4 encompassed his work from 2008-13, and we are now onto a new collection focusing on 2013-18.

While Rowland's definition of 'underground' doesn't necessarily equate with 'obscure' – Asia's 2014 set *Gravitas* gets a hearing here, for instance – he focuses on the kind of stuff that won't get much attention beyond outlets like, well, *Prog*. As such, this collection of books serves as something of a reference resource, and while his reviews are relatively light on florid description or context, he writes with a relatable sense of humour and an unapologetic frankness despite his obvious passion for the music and love of discovering new sounds. All of which makes reading *The Progressive Underground* like meeting the ultimate musically informed mate down the pub and asking them, "Heard anything good lately?" **JS**

RYUICHI SAKAMOTO

Opus MODERN FILMS

Monochrome final concert film from the Japanese genius.



As Ryuichi Sakamoto reached the end of his life last year, he no doubt thought about his legacy. As with his pristine work before it, his ongoing requiem has been exquisitely curated, with fans being drawn closer to him now than ever before. Last January, while still with us, he released the elegiac *12*. Then *Kagami* appeared at the Roundhouse in London a year later offering a unique VR experience where attendees could walk up to his projected image and look over his shoulder as he delicately stroked the piano in real time.

> **The colossus has left us but the music never will.**

Opus, shot for cinemas, feels like the most intimate rendezvous yet. Filmed in black and white, like the keys laid out before his fingers, it's a portrait of dignity in adversity. For the progressive Japanese composer — an indomitable figure as important to the story of Hollywood soundtracking as he is to electronica — the piano appears to have offered him some comfort in his final days, the instrument he'd learned growing up in Tokyo as a child prodigy fascinated by Bach and Debussy.

The intimacy is, of course, an illusion to a degree. A solitary Sakamoto would have been surrounded by crew at Tokyo's NHK Broadcasting Center, including his son, the film director Neo Sora. Sora was a hard taskmaster apparently, who insisted Sakamoto choose the setlist months in advance, largely drawn from recent adaptations for piano, though the musician does throw in the odd curveball such as Yellow Magic Orchestra's *Tong Poo*.

But the performances themselves illustrate Sakamoto's frailty and resolve in the most human of terms. Virtuosity is set against the challenges of a body that is letting him down, and sometimes Sora allows us to see his father fail. At the conclusion of *Aubade 2000*, Sakamoto lays down his tortoiseshell glasses and rubs his eyes, asking for time out, while for *Bibo No Aozora* his playing breaks down completely and he looks up and says, "I need a break. This is tough. I'm pushing myself." Exhaustion is etched across his kind, granitic features, offset with the wisps of beard and argent-white curtains of fringe.

These are moments that don't appear in any common or garden concert film, and they offer both insight and pathos. More often than not, though, Sakamoto plays his repertoire beautifully, and those little moments of achievement detectable in his face feel all the more triumphant when he comes through. For a split second at the end, we see a piano play on its own, a sign that the colossus has left us but the music never will.

JEREMY ALLEN

Take a bow

Lee Pomeroy adds heft to proceedings.

Wakeman Snr summons his "clarion calls and squelchy sounds".

RICK WAKEMAN

VENUE	THEATRE ROYAL DRURY LANE, LONDON
DATE	27/02/2024

Part way through Wakeman & The English Rock Ensemble's invigorating version of *Roundabout*, which opens a set of Yes material, one almost feels a sense of relief that it's neither being performed by Yes featuring Anderson Rabin and Wakeman nor by Yes Official — with the inevitable arguments that without Jon Anderson it isn't Yes. Rick Wakeman is simply playing a piece he loves with musicians whom he rates among the best he's ever worked with. And they are very impressive. Bass guitarist Lee Pomeroy forms a supple, powerful rhythm section with Adam Falkner, whose drumming straddles both 70s and modern styles; Dave Colquhoun, who has played guitar with Wakeman for 20 years — "Brian May's favourite guitarist," says Rick; and son Adam is on auxiliary keyboards. Rick, meanwhile, summons clarion calls and particularly squelchy sounds from his synths, and solos with brio.

And The BVs, as he calls them, are an impressive backing vocal trio featuring and conducted by Nick Shirm, and Mollie Marriott, daughter of Small Faces and Humble Pie legend Steve, shines on lead vocals. Together they add some soulful fervour to the song.

Wakeman has taken some liberties with the arrangements, and most work well. They play *The Meeting* from *Anderson Bruford Wakeman Howe* with a slightly cheesy bell sound on synth replacing the piano on the original, but he also adds a haunting a cappella vocal arrangement. It's followed by an animated, near-funky reading of Yes's 1977 hit single *Wonderous Stories* and a particular favourite of Rick's, the rather overlooked *South Side Of The Sky*. He says that when he joined Yes they discussed wanting to make rock music with a symphonic feel, which is exemplified by *And You And I* with its towering *Eclipse* sections. The typically exuberant Pomeroy adds heft to the sound with his bass pedals then jumps around with excitement, and the energy levels are high.

Earlier, Rick quipped, "We have an interval, that's because I have a bladder" and this first set flies by.

> **"The battle section of *Journey...* is preposterous but then so is *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*."**

After a costume change, and now wearing a fetching pink and purple glitter cape, Rick moves stage front, squints and says, "That white light is bright. When I see it at my age, I want to walk towards it."

The second half is an expanded version of *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth*, which was cut to fit LP length in 1973, with recorded narration by actor Peter Egan. It's such an odd piece — prog in excelsis; surreal; kitsch in places, moving in others; part Radio 4 play, part blockbuster movie soundtrack. After Egan gives us the very serious revelation that the explorers' party returns to the surface on Mount Etna, 3,000 miles from the point of their descent, Rick plays a cheeky excerpt from Grieg's *In The Hall Of The Mountain King*.

In the battle section, the explorers are at sea on homemade rafts while two aquatic dinosaurs chomp lumps out of each other, their peril giving rise to the haunting *'Save me...'* refrain. It's preposterous but then so is *Raiders Of The Lost Ark*, which would never have worked as just a movie about an archaeological dig, and both are great fun. It's fitting that *Journey...* is performed in a venue that tends to host musical theatre shows.

"We'll leave you with a nice gentle ballad." Rick announces and the encore is the 17-minute version of *Starship Trooper*. It's completely over-the-top with bass and guitar solos in the *Würm* section. Marriott and the BVs move onto playing keyboards and bass pedals, while Wakemans Snr and Jnr indulge in a spot of duelling keytars.

Rick has said that he's decided to give up playing live at 77, but some unclear comments have prompted mistaken claims online that he reaches that age on May 18, and this tour, The Return Of The Caped Crusader, is his last. But he'll be a mere 75 on that date. And while he'll be wrapping up one-man shows within a year, reports of his imminent retirement are, clearly, greatly exaggerated. He says that he'll return to the sumptuous Theatre Royal "if they'll have me", so it looks likely we'll see another return of The Caped Crusader and his Boy — and Girl — Wonders.

MIKE BARNES

How long until Wakeman Jnr gets his own cape, we wonder?

KEVIN NIXON

A wonderful evening with stellar artists? Yes!
Dave Colquhoun proves why he's Brian May's favourite six-stringer.
Like father, like son.
Mollie Marriott shines.
The collective in fine form, watched over by the caped prog crusader.
Roland
HAMMOND
moog

SLIFT

VENUE	ELECTRIC BALLROOM, LONDON
DATE	28/02/2024

Normality clearly didn't get a ticket this evening. The moment Slift take the stage at a crammed Electric Ballroom, they open a portal that distorts expectation, reason and genre convention. The band play space rock so psychedelic it sounds like Hawkwind have just returned from Arrakis, while a video backdrop flaunts celestial images that could easily have been a 70s *Doctor Who* title sequence. It's a wild spectacle in the best way.

Then again, what else should we have expected? Since they formed in Toulouse in 2016, these Frenchmen have dealt in ever-expanding sci-fi maximalism. Their second album, 2020's *Ummon*, quickly became a cult classic to anyone with ears for experimental, heavy and/or style-smashing sounds. Then this year's *Ilion* made that behemoth seem tiny in hindsight, venturing even further into cosmic mysticism and planet-sized songs. So naturally, tonight is another intergalactic-scale extravaganza!

Slift are only three members strong – composed of frontman Jean Fossat with brother Rémi on bass, plus drummer Canek Flores – but they use their manpower extremely economically. As the trio open with *Ilion*'s 11-minute title track, their music's both thunderous and intricate enough to feel like something from a six-piece. Flores and Rémi's low-end rumbles the chest, while Jean darts stunningly between atmospheric droning and taut complexity. The bandleader also flaunts some alien-sounding vocals, along with turns at a pulsing synthesiser, both of which make the show seem even more inhuman and enveloping.

Then there's that backdrop, with pools of light morphing constantly behind the band. During *Ilion*, washes of orange and white rush forwards, as if the Electric Ballroom is being pulled into a *2001: A Space Odyssey* space-time continuum. The colours swirl and buzz during *Ummon*, whereas *Uruk* heralds a static mess of brightness. The disorientating effect is only hammered home by an erratic light show, which somehow keeps up with all the time-signature-transcending technicality. White beams flash with every scathing solo and climactic burst of rock, yet aptly dim and mellow to complement the moments of synth-prog calm.

It's a dynamism matched by an absorbed crowd. Their energy peaks during the upbeat gallop of *Ummon* finale *Lions, Tigers And Bears. The Story That Has Never Been Told*, from *Ilion*, gets an abridged playthrough to keep the momentum high until the concert's conclusion.

By the time Slift are done, London feels like it's been ripped through a black hole and back. Tonight is an all-consuming ride, yet we'd all vote to relive it in an instant.

MATT MILLS

BIG BIG TRAIN

VENUE	RIVOLI THEATER, THE WILLIAMS CENTER, RUTHERFORD, NJ, USA
DATE	02/03/2024
SUPPORT	DAVE BAINBRIDGE

Tonight's performance from **Big Big Train** is quite special. Not only is it celebrating *The Likes Of Us* (their first studio album with vocalist Alberto Bravin replacing the late David Longdon), but perhaps more importantly, it marks their second-ever show in the United States. The collective are certainly up to the task, however, delivering a spellbinding concert that sees Bravin demonstrating his merits as their latest frontman. With opening support from beloved guitarist/keyboardist **Dave Bainbridge**, Big Big Train endure as one of modern prog rock's most prestigious groups.

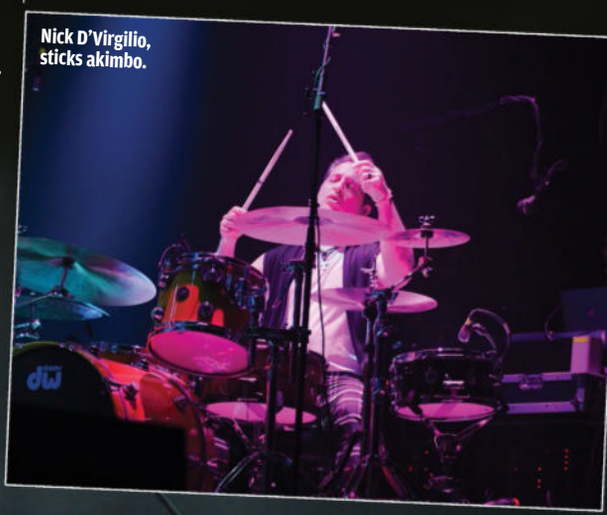
Dave Bainbridge and his cheeky grin.

Bainbridge gets things going with a 30-minute instrumental set comprising himself and pre-recorded tracks. It's an impressive feat: he dishes out ethereally vibrant, menacingly gothic and/or festively celtic compositions with the help of mesmeric textural looping and various sound effects (such as those of the ocean). Highlights include the hyperactive jamming of *To The Far Away* and the crestfallen atmospheres of *Luke The Calf* since they do the best jobs of showcasing the musician's capability to captivate with technological assistance.

Big Big Train arrive half an hour later and dive into more than two hours of exceptional stuff.

Clare Lindley bow belle.

Curiously, they play only one song from *The Likes Of Us*: the gorgeously uplifting and pastoral *Love Is The Light*, which finds Bravin and drummer/singer Nick D'Virgilio blending their voices beautifully as the band recreate nearly every nuance of the luscious studio version. As they do throughout the evening, the crowd eventually sing alongside them, enhancing the already strong air of bittersweet finality, hope, and community that so many Big Big Train classics convey.

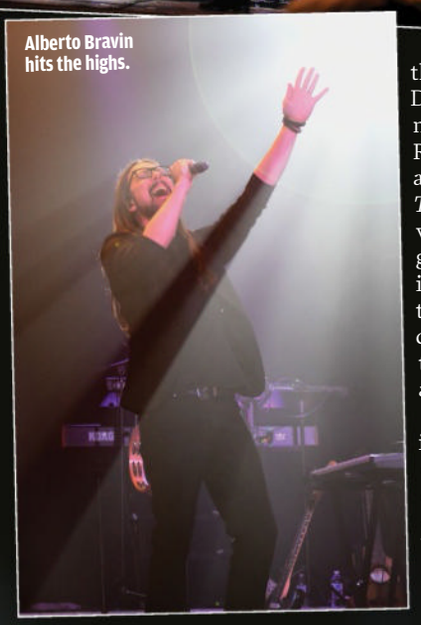


Nick D'Virgilio, sticks akimbo.

FRANK WHITE

Hey, Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for us...

Aside from that new song, their show seems designed as a tribute to Longdon with the focus solely on content from his time with them. In fact, they go all the way back to Longdon's debut LP, 2009's *The Underfall Yard*, via the primarily serene and relaxed *Victorian Brickwork*. The highly ambitious *English Electric* records receive attention through the inclusions of the magnificently tense *The First Rebreather* and *Summoned By Bells*, as well as the complexly forlorn *A Boy In Darkness* and *East Coast Racer*. Although he doesn't evoke the regal heft and range of Longdon — who could? — Bravin excels at putting his characteristic spin on the material.



Alberto Bravin hits the highs.

The same holds true for everything else they do, such as the joyfully feisty title track to 2016's *Folklore* (which opens their set). It's followed by several other relatively recent gems, with the playful panic of *The Connection Plan* and the epic and multifaceted majesty of *A Mead Hall In Winter* standing out most. That said, arguably the greatest moment of the night comes when D'Virgilio and Beardfish multi-instrumentalist Rikard Sjöblom collaborate on a lovely rendition of *Telling The Bees*. Armed with their voices, D'Virgilio's acoustic guitar and Sjöblom's piano, it's a wonderful testament to Big Big Train's persistent compositional brilliance *and* their ability to shine in just about any configuration.

Adding to the spectacle is an impressive number of coloured lights that compensate for the lack of any other visual accompaniments by capturing the tempo and mood of each song with awe-inspiring intricacy and accuracy. Bravin and/or D'Virgilio frequently provide revealing anecdotes and humorous banter to cement their excitement, comfortability and relationship with fans. Bravin even runs around the venue during the penultimate *Apollo*, thrilling everyone he passes.

With Bainbridge's inventive support, Big Big Train's performance is one for the ages. The almost complete absence of pieces from *The Likes Of Us* is odd, yet it's hard to complain when they fill their time with one outstanding past tune after another. Bravin surely wins over lingering naysayers with his talent and personality, and the rest of the band nail every note they play while establishing a bond with their audience.

Regardless of how long they've been around and how many setbacks they've faced, there's no doubt that Big Big Train remain a one-of-a-kind delight.

JORDAN BLUM

Big Big Train focus on the oldies (but goodies).

> **"There's no doubt that Big Big Train remain a one-of-a-kind delight."**

ENSLAVED

VENUE	ISLINGTON ASSEMBLY HALL, LONDON
DATE	06/03/2024

Integrity is defined in the dictionary as "the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles". Tonight that's manifested in both human and creative form by these five unassuming (offstage, at least) Norwegians who constantly refuse to take the easy path and continue to evolve into a band that inspire further with each release and every live performance.

Easy would have been not to stray too far from the black-metal blueprint Enslaved helped forge in the 90s with early demos *Nema* or *Yggdrasill*. It certainly wouldn't have been to incorporate more and more elements of their beloved progressive rock into their sound, beginning with 2004's *Isa*, and which have been steadily growing as the band's career has progressed beyond their 30th year.

Easy certainly isn't the defiantly prog rock sound that opens this first night of the band's current European tour in support of last year's excellent *Heimdal* album. Since Shaman Elephant keyboardist Håkon Vinje's addition to their ranks in 2017, there's been an even more adventurous musical approach from the Bergen quintet, but tonight, for the opening five songs, the Enslaved sound is majestic, rich and symphonic. *Kingdom*, *Homebound*, *Forest Dweller* and *Sequence* act more like a melodic prog suite, before they invite cellist Jo Quail to join them for a rampaging take on *Congelia*.

Admittedly these songs represent the band's last two and most defiantly stylistically prog releases, but even this writer's very pleasantly surprised by the overtly non-metal approach they take. Of course, it doesn't sit well with everyone in the packed crowd. One hefty Scandinavian fellow next to *Prog* growls something in Norwegian. We might not understand the actual words, but the inference is very clear. It might not be the young metalhead screaming, "Stop playing this prog shit!" we encountered when we saw Enslaved play The Dome in 2018, but it's the kind of thing, along with the gripes of anti-metal brigade in the prog community, that Enslaved continue to endure for their craft.

As a richly atmospheric *Frost* leads into a more aggressive *Loke*, it's clear the second half of the show has more to offer older fans, but it also demonstrates that back in 1994 Enslaved had more musical intrigue than many like-minded bands. The heroic *Havenless* from 2003's *Below The Lights*, sung largely in their native tongue, sees the band adopt their traditional arms-aloft celebration, before *Heimdal* and *Isa* return us to a more traditional prog metal sound and *Allfǫðr Oðinn* offers a defiantly old-school farewell.

A terrific night from a band refusing to pander to anyone, delivered with integrity and talent in spades.

JERRY EWING

WOBBLER

VENUE	BELLEVILLE, COSMOPOLITE, OSLO, NORWAY
DATE	02/03/2024

On a late winter's night in Oslo, a group of self-professed "Progheads" from a Facebook community with thousands of members are at the city's historical Cosmopolite to celebrate their 10th anniversary. This year, the highlight is a headline set from Norway's finest symphonic prog ensemble, Wobbler.

The six-song performance lasts for over an hour and a half and opens with one of the band's earliest tracks, *Rubato Industry*, from their very first record, 2005's *Hinterland*. Frontman Andreas Prestmo wasn't even in the band when it came out, but he performs it live like he'd written it; fully engaged, beating the tambourine with fervour and leading an audience clap-along. Wobbler then jump forward to 2020's *Dwellers Of The Deep*, whose *Five Rooms* showcases Lars Fredrik Frøislie's keyboard flare and Marius Halleland's edgy lead guitar.

Some people begin to dance and wave their hands in the air. Prestmo thanks the audience and the organisers of the event before launching into the 21-minute classic progressive masterpiece *From Silence To Somewhere*. Drummer Martin Nordrum Kneppen shines here, particularly with the timpani mallets and snare work and even some charming recorder-playing. Frøislie's fluid organ-playing combines stately motifs with a pulsating rhythm, which the crowd move along to with religious fervour, knowing and anticipating every note. The transitions are seamless, and by the end you can feel the floor moving as Prestmo's world-class vocals fill the room.

Fermented Hours comes next. It's Kristian Hultgren's turn to shine with his flawless, musical and dexterous delivery before a more soothing section of the set begins with *This Past Presence* from *Rites At Dawn*, featuring a lengthy keyboard passage and a jazzy bass solo. As his guitar solo progresses, Halleland cleverly segues into the melody of *Happy Birthday* in celebration of the Progheads' group's anniversary and the audience show their gratitude by cheering loudly. Prestmo ends the track on his knees. He's an expressive and passionate frontman who gives everything to each performance, whether at a large festival or in an intimate, small theatre, as Belleville is.

Prestmo rises again as *Merry Macabre*, an epic 19-minute suite from *Dwellers Of The Deep*, begins. He dances around the stage and some of the audience even come down from the balconies to join the dance party on the floor. They're rewarded by Prestmo leaving the stage to lie down between their feet, serenely singing, '*Here I lie, slowly descending*'.

Several members of the crowd exclaim in Norwegian: "The world's best, Wobbler!" It's hard to disagree.

ANNE-MARIE FORKER

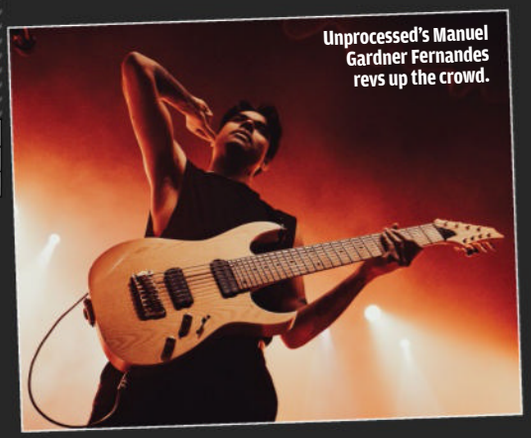
TESSERACT

VENUE	O2 RITZ, MANCHESTER
DATE	24/02/2024
SUPPORT	UNPROCESSED

TesseracT are coming to the end of a run of more than 30 shows throughout Europe and the UK, and tonight it's the turn of the north of England, with the quintet swinging by a dreary Manchester. Following a chaotic warm-up from **The Callous Daoboys**, which piques the crowd's interest, it's the turn of German melodic prog metallers **Unprocessed**, who seem to have refined their stage presence since 2023's Radar Festival, where we thought they fell a little flat. This time around, vocalist Manuel Gardner Fernandes holds the audience in the palm of his hand. He fills the stage, pacing from one side to the other while delivering flawless, soaring vocals and executing exemplary growls that deliver a much more intense impact in a live setting than recorded.

Unprocessed hurtle through a selection of tracks from 2023's *...And Everything In Between* and 2019's *Artificial Void* accompanied by standalone single *Deadrose*, before closing on *Haven* from 2018's *Covenant*. Delivering their signature meandering riffs without missing a note and demanding the audience's uncapped energy is no easy task, but the outfit ease into their role seamlessly. The crowd engagement, while a little over-the-top at times, shows a willingness to absorb the energy from the sold-out venue as the members encourage circle pits to roars of approval. As the lights dim, Unprocessed should be proud of the show they put on to such a diverse crowd tonight.

A buzz of anticipation begins to line the thickened air of the O2 Ritz as **TesseracT**'s signature cubic logo backdrop is revealed, alongside an impressive lighting set-up. As each member silently takes the stage, the audience by contrast increase their audible glee. By the time vocalist Daniel Tompkins joins his



Unprocessed's Manuel Gardner Fernandes revs up the crowd.

Acle Kahney locks with licks.

Flawless vocals from Daniel Tompkins.

Hair-raiser: TesseracT's James Monteith.

KEVIN ASHBURN

bandmates, any restraint in the crowd has been done away with. Pits erupt periodically throughout the packed floor as the headliners hurtle into *Natural Disaster* from 2023's *War Of Being*.

From the outset, TesseracT demonstrate they're continuing on their trajectory towards becoming one of prog metal's biggest names. There's an air of professionalism that we've not seen demonstrated to this level from the quintet so far in their career. The lights are synchronised to the djent riffs that pound through the venue, and each member has a signature stage presence — whether that's bassist Amos Williams's barefoot, berobed appearance, Tompkins's cathartic dancing, which appears to function as a mental release for him, or drummer Jay Postones's powerful, thundering fills accompanied by a grin.

Despite being a behemothic 11-minute track, the mixed crowd hang on every second of *War Of Being*'s presentation, from the solitary chimes of the opening notes through the chugging riffs that have the depth and impact to vibrate internal organs, to Tompkins's flawlessly delivered vocals both clean and screamed. It's rare that a band can showcase their newest offering to the same enthusiasm and eagerness from the crowd that they show for the beloved tracks from earlier albums, but TesseracT achieve that with every track they perform from their current release.

Barefoot and berobed: Amos Williams.

When Tompkins asks the Manchester crowd, "Who here has never seen TesseracT before?" around half the audience raise a hand. It's impressive and heartwarming to note that, more than a decade on from their debut, the quintet are still winning over new fans with every release.

Although the tour is billed as the release support for the powerfully impressive *War Of Being*, there are plenty of older tracks on offer for TesseracT fans of all eras, whether that's *Nocturne* from 2013's *Altered State*, *Juno* and *King* from 2018's *Sonder*, or the initial duo of *Concealing Fate* tracks, *Acceptance* and *Deception*, from their 2011 debut album *One*, which the band use as an encore complete with sparkling pyrotechnics and a venue-encompassing light show.

The theatre of a TesseracT live show has been making an impact on anyone lucky enough to witness it for some years now, but tonight is an elevation in every sense of the word.

CHERI FAULKNER

TesseracT: still winning over new fans.

> **"The theatre of a TesseracT live show has been making an impact for some years now, but tonight is an elevation."**

FRANCK CARDUCCI & THE FANTASTIC SQUAD

VENUE	THE 1865, SOUTHAMPTON
DATE	03/03/2024
SUPPORT	RUBY DAWN

Just a handful of inquisitive fans greeted Franck Carducci and his earlier band on their first visit to Southampton nine years ago. Multiply that handful into triple figures and the airy south coast venue is looking healthily full for a Sunday night. Several fans have travelled significant distances to get their fix of France's fantastic five.

Replacing Lesoir, the originally billed support, **Ruby Dawn** are hauntingly compelling, fusing rock dynamics and driving rhythms with mystical eastern vibes. Carola Baer sings with both delicate and gritty soulfulness, though her flowing keyboards sound muted in the overall mix.

A flurry of soundbites from classic rock songs heralds the arrival of shades-wearing **Franck Carducci** and his four playmates for super-charged opener *Slave To Rock'n'Roll*. Carducci carefully curates his shows, enabling each member to shine individually, both musically and theatrically. This immediately becomes apparent on *Achilles*, on which the brooding presence of Cédric Selzer gets into his groove with both tinkling keyboards and Hammond organ effects.

Mary Reynaud, Carducci's long-time musical partner, is a shimmering, animated presence throughout. Highlights are her vocal gymnastics on Ennio Morricone's *The Ecstasy Of Gold*, the ethereal beauty of *Angel*, lifted visually by her LED-lit wings and the physically seductive theremin solo on *The Betrayal Of Blue*.

Hair flying, guitarist Barth Sky riffs the proverbial doors off on the new song, slam-dunk rocker *The Limits Of Freedom*. The Zeppelin-like *Torn Apart* later sees him and Carducci elevating to full rock-god mode.

Artificial Paradises is a reminder that Carducci really knows how to construct a classy, complex prog song. Drummer Léa Fernandez is in her element, powering through all its tempo changes with a huge smile. Later, she delights with a thundering drum solo with distinct Bonham overtones. Carducci's traditional acoustic guitar solo spot is a cover of *Wish You Were Here*, poignantly dedicated to a local fan who recently passed away. Everyone joins in.

Alice's Eerie Dream, their burlesque retelling of the Lewis Carroll fairy tale, continues to evolve artistically so it now includes a stately dance trio sequence involving Reynaud, Selzer and Sky. They end as always with the unamplified five-part vocal harmonies of *On The Road To Nowhere*, during which Selzer's bass voice humorously comes to the fore.

Carducci's tried and much-trusted formula is a masterclass in prog cabaret. Not even a broken guitar string nor scarf malfunction can detract from the joyous energy the band generates.

ALISON REIJMAN

DISTRICT 97

VENUE	REGGIE'S MUSIC JOINT, CHICAGO, IL, USA
DATE	03/03/2024

It's a chilly Sunday evening in Chicago. Many in the city have settled into their homes for the evening, bringing their weekends to a close to gear up for work or school the next morning. However, a passionate band of music fans have gathered at Reggie's Music Joint, a quaint South Side venue known for featuring prog bands, with an entirely different purpose in mind. They've come to rock! Or, more appropriately, to *be* rocked! Hometown heroes District 97 are here to make that possible.

District 97 might be using the smaller of the venue's multiple stages, but they take that stage with the attitude of a band playing in an auditorium or amphitheatre. They've recently released *Stay For The Ending*, their best and most accessible studio work to date, and they waste no time in driving this point home.

Vocalist Leslie Hunt gives the remaining bandmembers a few measures to establish a heavy, yet highly disciplined, stutter-stop foundation before jumping in to belt out the opening strains of *The Actual Color*. Her voice is clean and powerful, sounding as though she's been onstage for an hour or so already, and there's more than enough room for the rest of the band to provide the musical yang to Hunt's yin. The audience are musical putty in the hands of a band eager to mould them.

Classic material gives way to the new as D97 fire off the first two of six new tunes in *Mirror* and *Stay For The Ending* itself. The group's unbridled enthusiasm for their latest work shows instantly. Guitarist Jim Tashjian – who also harmonises with Hunt – and bassist Tim Seisser provide a sense of growl and thump, respectively, while trading knowing smiles with one another. Keyboardist Andrew Lawrence's synthesiser strains create an ethereal soundscape, while drummer Jonathan Schang provides the bedrock that holds everything in place. What makes this five-piece so special? That question is answered again and again before our eyes and ears.

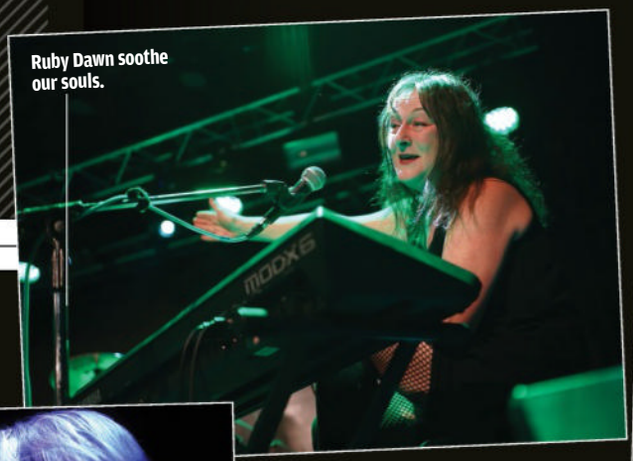
Not every prog band can boast of having a lead vocalist who finished in the Top 10 of *American Idol*. But by no means does this make Hunt act as though D97 is all about her, a point she drives home more than once by leaving the stage altogether to allow her bandmates to shine, which they do. There's every bit as much Dream Theater emanating from the stage as there ever will be Taylor Swift.

By the time District 97 complete their 60-plus-minute set, the intimate and highly energetic audience are clamouring for more. But the band are happy to leave us wanting just that. They know we'll be back for another go-round whenever our presence is requested.

CEDRIC HENDRIX

FUSION FESTIVAL

VENUE	CIVIC CENTRE, STOURPORT
DATE	02/03/2024


Ruby Dawn soothe our souls.

Part of the thrill of festivals is that anything can happen. So, when a fire alarm forces everyone at the Fusion Festival out into sub-zero conditions for 15 minutes during headliner Franck Carducci's set on Saturday night, it's all considered part of the fun. This Stourport-based festival has carved out a successful niche for itself over five editions. Its spacious venue and relaxed vibe are hard to fault, as is the infrastructure that organisers Steve and Lou Gould have built around the event.

Flamborough Head's Margriet Boomsma gets medieval.

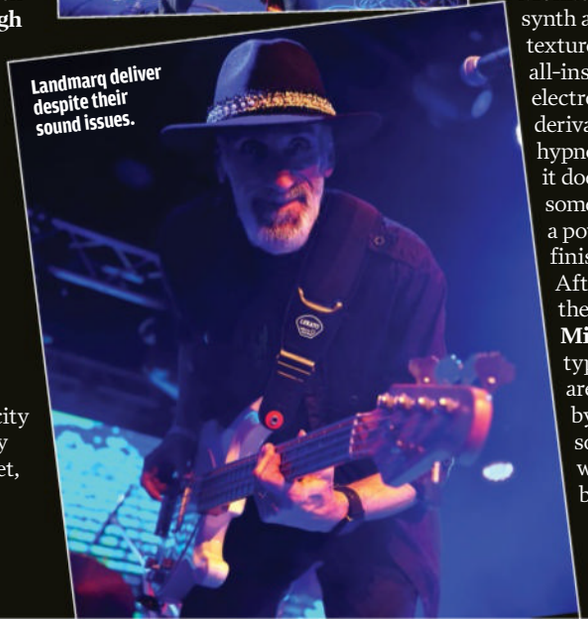
Some last-minute organisational issues — which can happen to any event like this — do impact what happens onstage, however. While a new audio company largely copes well with a demanding schedule, the onstage sound is variable, and with changeovers tight, the festival runs increasingly late on both days that *Prog* attends, with onstage monitoring also an issue in many bands' sets. But with some exceptions, these are largely minor considerations, and the audience laps up a feast of proggy goodness.

EBB's Erin Bennett and Bad Dog help the band nail their set.

Saturday begins well, with a soothing and atmospheric set from **Ruby Dawn**, who make the most of this early slot. The relaxed vibe continues with a rare UK appearance from Dutch veterans **Flamborough Head**, who deliver a classy, stately set. It's very impressive if a touch rusty in places, but Margriet Boomsma's flute and recorder add a pleasing medieval character to what is otherwise a mid-paced performance.

Finns Overhead go down a storm.

The increasingly impressive **EBB** are up next, and despite missing the eccentricity of Kitty Biscuits, they nail their one-hour set, while also making excellent use of the stunning LED screen that enhances the visuals for the whole weekend. The perennially classy **Landmarq** initially struggle with their onstage sound, but recover brilliantly to deliver a typically well-honed performance, their last before a period off the road to complete their long-awaited new album.


Landmarq deliver despite their sound issues.

Kite Parade are similarly classy, but feel like a work in progress. Vocalist Andy Foster is a terrific frontman, the material is excellent, and he has assembled some excellent musicians around him, but there are too many backing tracks, and the band badly need a keyboard player for live work if they're to win the hearts and minds of the prog community. Crowd favourites **Pearl Handled Revolver** stretch the prog definition somewhat. Their bluesy, Hammond-dominated music is closer to The Doors than anything symphonic, but with *Prog* spotting some audience members actually dancing, they provide welcome sonic variation.

Sunday also begins well, with a short set from **MonkeyTrial**. Mixing synth and guitar textures, their all-instrumental electronica is derivative but hypnotic, even if it does meander somewhat until a powerful surge finishes the set. After **The Room**, the impressive **The Mighty Ra** play typically well, but are badly hampered by the worst sound of the weekend. It's borderline

MARC AUGER

Hayley Griffiths has one foot in prog and one in symphonic metal.

Magenta wrap up a fantastic weekend.

unlistenable, which is a desperate shame as the band themselves are on great form. **The Hayley Griffiths Band** fare a lot better with a performance that straddles progressive rock and symphonic metal. The vocalist adds a professional theatricality, and her well-drilled band perform admirably, even if the mix is a little drum-heavy.

Another European band making a rare UK appearance are **Overhead** from Finland. They're a revelation — perhaps the band of the weekend. Their alternative take on progressive rock is original and dynamic, a view clearly shared by the audience, who give them a rousing reception. Although the Finns are a tough act to follow, **Rosalie Cunningham** and band compete admirably. This is prog but processed through a highly entertaining cabaret-influenced filter, recalling both 1970s glam and 1960s psychedelia

"Magenta are the best festival-closers in the business, and they deliver a high-energy, greatest hits set."

Magenta are perhaps the best festival-closers in the business, and this new-look version of that band deliver a high-energy, greatest hits set, focusing mainly on their more song-orientated material, heavy on crowd-pleasing moments rather than studied prog complexity. Despite the lateness of the hour, it sends the audience home on a high to end another highly enjoyable weekend.

STEPHEN LAMBE

Rosalie Cunningham gets trippy.

LEPROUS

VENUE	PROJECT HOUSE, LEEDS
DATE	02/03/2024
SUPPORT	NORDIC GIANTS

Over the course of seven albums, **Leprous** have learnt to balance the vibrant but contrasting flavours that comprise their sonic DNA. Consequently, that's helped draw an interesting cross-section of fans – from extreme metalheads to old-school proggers – to this former warehouse. Understanding this, the Norwegian art-rockers' 14-song set has something for everyone.

While each bandmember has an ability to draw the eye, **Nordic Giants** employ the opposite approach for their set. The feather-festooned duo hide in the shadows at either side of the screens that sit centre-stage, scoring the quirky short films that are played on them. Ostensibly, they're a post-rock band and have all the meditative hallmarks to prove it, but live, they're an intriguingly multimedia experience. *Illuminate* feels like something plucked from Tim Burton's dream catcher, its coffin carrier visuals paired with shimmery keys and steady-yet-contemplative drum work. *Together*, on the other hand, feels both restless and melancholic, its dizzying visuals furthering a surreal aesthetic that is enthusiastically received by the crowd.

Admittedly, Leprous's opener *Have You Ever?*, which has more space than a Tesco car park on a Sunday night, feels a little underwhelming for an opening statement. Thankfully, when *The Price*'s polyrhythmic grooves and powerful vocal hooks take hold, that's quickly forgotten. *Foe*, from *Coal* (which the band played in full at Damnation Festival in November), and a rare outing for *The Flood* round out a peerless trio of songs, which are in equal measure extravagant, angularly ambitious and thoughtfully tempered.

The band feel slicker than ever, as the passionately expelled *On Hold*, which blossoms out of its introspective shell for a towering math rock finale, melts into a heart-stirring *Castaway Angels*, and the way *Slave*'s dark majesty breathlessly makes way for *Distant Bells*' shadowy balladry is pure theatre.

Leprous are resolutely polished and ruthless in their execution, but it never feels mechanical. On occasions guitarist Tor Oddmund Suhrke and bassist Simen Børven jump onto keyboards as they showcase an impressive fluidity, with Suhrke even pulling off a mid-song guitar swap on *The Flood*. He and Robin Ognedal possess a wonderful dichotomy that sees full-bodied eight-string riffs playing off cutting Stratocaster lines more in line with John Mayer than John Petrucci. It typifies the band's ability to let their musical personalities meet in a well-balanced middle.

Tracks like the genteel *Out Of Here* have as much right being in their set as the impervious apocalypse in 11/4 *The Sky Is Red*, which punctuates the set like an asteroid. With a new album expected soon (much of it is already recorded), Leprous's next chapter isn't far away.

PHIL WELLER

CYNIC

VENUE	THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON
DATE	14/03/2024

Three decades ago, no one would have predicted this. When Cynic released their full-length debut, *Focus*, in 1993, they were presented as the newest name in death metal, signed to Roadrunner Records and based in the scene's capital of Tampa, Florida. However, the album was a celestial prog wormhole and the backlash forced the band to break up a year later.

Compare that outrage to today. *Focus* has become a seminal text in progressive metal, its layers of vocoder, experimental melodies and jazz-like drumming inspiring countless acts, yet have never been emulated. Tonight, Cynic are performing a once-reviled first impression in its entirety for its belated 30th birthday, and The Underworld is sold out for the spectacle.

Cynic, famously and for years a trio, have expanded their line-up to convey their opus's textures: joining lynchpin Paul Masvidal are drummer Matt Lynch, guitarist Max Phelps and bassist Brandon Giffin, with Steffen Kummerer of support band Obscura contributing the odd snarl from side-stage. The collective make opener *Veil Of Maya* a wash of wonderful sound, its jagged riff tempered by Masvidal's digitised singing, Lynch's stunning technicality and Giffin's funky approach. The vocals and sheer instrumental prowess combine to make this set, much like the album it's honouring, sound like a musical transmission from some advanced society light years away.

Through *Celestial Voyage*, *The Eagle Nature* and beyond, *Focus* still sounds as futuristic as it did in 1993, and the show strikes a crescendo with the album's finale, *How Could I*. The singing/growling back-and-forths, the intricate yet accessible riff and, of course, that majestic solo at its end reiterate the piece's standing as a Cynic standout.

Afterwards, the band return for a second set abridging the remainder of their career, which begins with a tribute to two of their recently lost pillars. Drummer Sean Reinert (who passed in January 2020) and bassist Sean Malone (who died by suicide 11 months later) are memorialised with an acoustic rearrangement of *Integral Birth*. Masvidal battles through microphone faults, which frequently electrocute his mouth, to make the track a moving suite, not to mention evidence of Cynic's excellence even without the cybernetic and virtuoso layers.

The full band return for a closing victory lap, playing highlights that include *Adam's Murmur* and *Kindly Bent To Free Us*. With their undying beauty, the songs only reaffirm the mastery this project have always shown. In 1993, the world wasn't ready for what Cynic had to say, so it's heartening to see them filling venues and stilling audiences in awe as they celebrate their career, their masterpiece and their fallen brothers.

MATT MILLS

THE PINEAPPLE THIEF

VENUE	O2 SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE, LONDON
DATE	16/03/2024
SUPPORT	RANDY McSTINE

As a measure of the level of excitement preceding tonight's show, an audible gasp from the stalls is swiftly followed by the kind of enthusiastic cheers usually reserved for favourite songs when two of the road crew lift the black drapes to reveal Gavin Harrison's drum kit. Positioned away at stage-left instead of the upstage home that's traditional for tub thumpers, the drum nerds strain their necks as they cast their admiring glances over an extended kit that includes a wide variety of rack toms, floor toms and a range of cymbals of different sizes. And though there are no such hollers for the unveiling of Steve Kitch's keyboards, the love is undoubtedly still there.

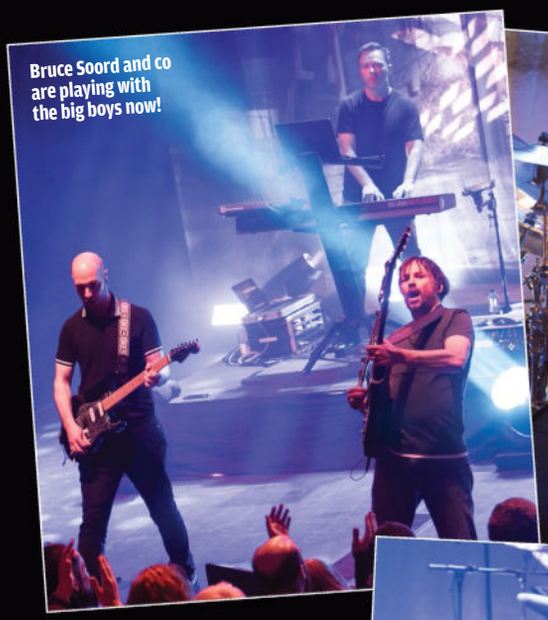
Randy McStine takes a stand.

Indeed, a level of politeness is palpable throughout, not least when a voice over the PA politely requests that patrons don't film the show, an announcement that comes in stark contrast to the harsh greeting Roger Waters meted out to his fans last summer. And that warmth is extended to New Yorker **Randy McStine**, who reciprocates in kind with his opening set. Probably best known as The Porcupine Tree's touring guitarist ("I was stood just there," he says helpfully pointing at stage-right), the pulsating and undulating sequencers and synthesisers at the start of his set would suggest a student of the Berlin school, but he soon bunks off from class with his acoustic guitar, which is fed through a number of loopers while he dances nimbly across his pedal board. By the time he's finished repurposing *Activate* and *Big Wave* from his collaborations with Marco Minnemann, McStine can chalk up a decent victory.

The Pineapple Thief are standing at a tipping point. This is the final night of a 20-date excursion that's seen them tour from one end of Europe to the next and their name — alongside that of *It Leads To This*, their 15th and current album — has come to be mentioned in favourable terms even beyond the pages of *Prog*. It also happens to be their biggest headlining date in the capital and that European sojourn has clearly turned The Pineapple Thief into a well-drilled band whose sheen matches the blue and red lights that frequently bathe the stage and strafe the audience.

Opening with recent single *The Frost*, The Pineapple Thief display no visible nerves as they set the agenda for the evening. While frequent dips into their considerable back catalogue are expected and made, their new material sits with ease and confidence. *Rubicon* cuts and slices through angular verses before bouncing in between as elsewhere *Every Trace Of Us* finds the band pushing and pulling with frontman Bruce Soord overdriving

WILL IRELAND



Bruce Soord and co are playing with the big boys now!

Big cheers for Gavin Harrison.

Jon Sykes: locked and loaded.

his guitar in tandem with Beren Matthews, a man given to playing over his neck with his fretting hand rather than under for a number of his six-string attacks. And for all his virtuosity, Gavin Harrison never threatens to overwhelm by serving the material as he locks in with bassist Jon Sykes.

There are caveats. The Pineapple Thief aren't a band given to playing off each other, electing instead to maintain their positions onstage. Granted, Soord and Sykes move around towards the end of the set, but for the most part Matthews puts his foot up on Kitch's riser while keeping his head bowed.

Minor quibbles aside, the aural experience makes up for any visual shortcomings. *Versions Of The Truth* remains pertinent at a time when reality is under attack from any number of vested interests, hucksters and snake oil salesmen. The explosive and passionate double whammy of *Give It Back* and *The Final Thing On My Mind* that brings the main set to a close is the kind of showstopper that could bring them to the attention of a wider audience. As they stand arm-in-arm to take their bow, The Pineapple Thief do so as a band absolutely at the top of their game.

JULIAN MARSZALEK

The Pineapple Thief focus on giving a top musical experience above all else.

> **"As they stand to take their bow, The Pineapple Thief do so as a band absolutely at the top of their game."**

THE SMILE

VENUE	EVENTIM APOLLO, LONDON
DATE	10/03/2024

When Thom Yorke sings, '*Just gotta turn myself inside out...*' on *Friend Of A Friend*, it's hard to shake the feeling that he could well be referencing The Smile's modus operandi when it comes to their songwriting. And while it's always been so since Radiohead made the quantum leap from the alt rock of *The Bends* to the game-changing *OK Computer* and beyond, the two albums released by The Smile – 2022's *A Light For Attracting Attention* and this year's magnificent *Wall Of Eyes* – have also shown that this is no mere side-project but a band in their own right with a burst of creativity that leaves the day job in the shade.

It takes time and effort to unearth The Smile's recorded pearls; the listener has to dive in and make sense of music that appears to have arrived with its inner surface exposed. That might go some way to explaining the sold-out crowd's somewhat muted reaction this evening, but that doesn't stop the trio of Thom Yorke, Jonny Greenwood and Sons Of Kemet drummer Tom Skinner (along with saxophonist Robert Stillman) letting rip in a manner that suggests that they're actually having – whisper it – fun.

Though it would be erroneous to suggest that Thom Yorke has become a song and dance man, his performance is buoyed by an enthusiasm that he isn't generally noted for. While Greenwood hunches over the guitars, basses and keyboards that, like Yorke, he alternates between songs, he does so with an unrestrained sense of glee as his long fringe threatens to sweep the floor. Could it be that the younger Skinner, whose skittering beats and off-roading approach, is keeping them on their feet? The frequent looks in his direction from the long-term bandmates would suggest so, alongside the joy of playing new music unencumbered by the weight of expectation.

Indeed, such is that joy that The Smile play two new songs tonight that deftly display their range. Premiered two days earlier in Dublin, *Zero Sum* is propelled by a teeth-grinding edginess that turns anxiety into a perverse pleasure. At the other end of the musical spectrum, *Instant Psalm*'s linear melody and beats veer in the direction of what could be considered conventional songwriting, albeit forced through their own idiosyncratic grinder.

The LED wall behind the band blinks and winks to suggest both of their albums' titles, and its strobed intensity during an eight-minute reading of main-set closer *Bending Hectic* feels like being stared down as the song reaches its distorted and powerful climax.

On this showing and the globe-trotting dates ahead of them, it would appear that The Smile have superseded Radiohead. And tonight that feels like a good thing.

JULIAN MARSZALEK

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PRESS/ED FIELDING

CHRISSY MOSTYN (THE BLACKHEART ORCHESTRA)

The great and good of progressive music give us a glimpse into their prog worlds. **As told to Grant Moon.**

Where's home?
Sunny Wigan in Greater Manchester!

What's your earliest memory of prog?
My oldest brother was in university by the time I landed on the planet, and I remember he was very immersed in all kinds of music, including ELO, Fairport and Kate Bush.

The first prog album you bought?
Sigur Rós – *Með Suð Í Eyrum Við Spilum Endalaust*. I remember being at a ferry port in Dublin one night on the way home after some gigs, and *Fljotavik* poured out of the car radio. I was captivated. The next day I ran to my local HMV to collect all that was on offer of theirs.

And the most recent?
Mammal Hands' *Gift From The Trees*, and *Ubiquity* by Haunt The Woods.

Your first prog gig?
Cruise To The Edge, 2014. We had covered *Northern Lights* by Renaissance and Annie [Haslam] contacted us to say how much she liked it, and she invited us. So my first prog gig was a beautiful prog banquet in the middle of the Caribbean Sea, where I discovered so many artists I now love – Renaissance, of course, Marillion, Tangerine Dream, and it's where we met the wonderful Lifesigns.

And the latest?
The Hallé [Orchestra] with Radiohead's Jonny Greenwood, playing the music of Steve Reich at Manchester Bridgewater Hall in February. Magnificent.

The best prog show you ever saw?
Sigur Rós at Wasing Estate [Berkshire, in 2023], not only because they're one of my favourites and I didn't know if they would ever tour again, but the setting was just perfect. It's a natural amphitheatre nestled within a treescape, it was a beautiful July evening, and the show, sound and lights were just spectacular.

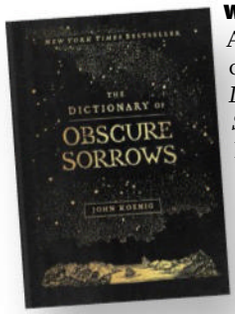
Latest discovery: Jonna Lee, aka Iamamiwhoami.

ANDY SHEPPARD/REDFERNS VIA GETTY IMAGES

Your latest prog discovery?
Iamamiwhoami – I'm really enjoying exploring their work.

Do you have a guilty musical pleasure?
Although I'm a singer and lyricist primarily, my music collection consists of a lot of instrumental artists, minimalist classical composers such as Ólafur Arnalds and Ludovico Einaudi, and ambient electronica creators like Jon Hopkins and Kiasmos.

Outside of music, what are you into?
Psychology, especially the neuroscience elements, and philosophy; getting lost in a good book; horror movies – especially old horrors with amazing scores (hello, John Carpenter). I immerse myself in nature as often as I can to recharge.



What's a good book?
At the moment I'm obsessed with *The Dictionary Of Obscure Sorrows* by John Koenig. It's awe-inspiringly beautiful.

Have you ever had a prog-related date?
Not yet!

> Annie Haslam said how much she liked our version of *Northern Lights*.

GUY HARROP
Hawkwind's prolific leader, Dave Brock.

Who's your prog hero?
Dave Brock. He's prolific, humble, has a real sense of social and climate justice, animal advocate, and a really lovely soul.

What's the most important piece of prog music?
Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite Of Spring*. Progressive music is all about rule-breaking and striving and searching for something new and greater, and Stravinsky certainly achieved this. And any piece of music that causes a riot on its first performance has to have something going for it.

Which prog muso would you most like to work with?
I'm going to have to say [Sigur Rós's] Jónsi.

Which prog album always puts you in a good mood?
Nick Cave's *Ghosteen*. Yes, I know it's sad but I am happily immersed in melancholia!

Your favourite prog album cover?
Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here*. I love the nod to the masks we sometimes wear due to fear of really being seen, and it always calls up the aesthetic of *Halloween III* – one of my favourite old horror movies.

What are you up to at the moment?
We're currently on a UK tour, which will be followed by three dates in the Netherlands with Karnataka. Then we're recording the new album, with another tour in the autumn.

See theblackheartorchestra.com.

NEW RELEASES

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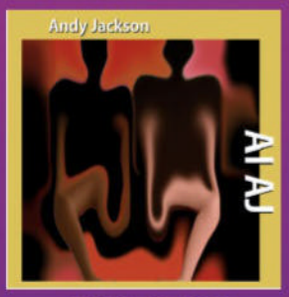

ANDY JACKSON
'AI AJA'
(CD & BLU-RAY EDITION)

- AI AJ' is an album which was inspired by the ongoing debate about the impact of artificial intelligence technology on our lives.
- As one has come to expect of Andy Jackson, this new album is once again an impressive and thoughtful musical work of sonic excellence. The release also features a Blu Ray disc featuring a stunning 96 kHz / 24-bit 5.1 Surround Sound mix. 'AI AJ' is destined to become one of the most original, impressive and talked about progressive albums of the year.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

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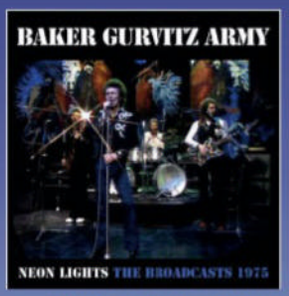
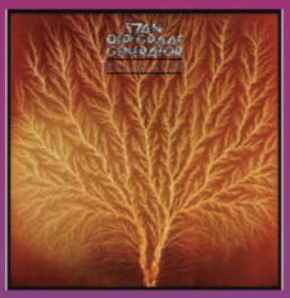


BAKER GURVITZ ARMY
'NEON LIGHTS - THE BORADCASTS 1975'
(3CD/2DVD BOXSET)

- New remastered 3CD & 2 DVD clamshell boxed set of archive live recordings by Baker Gurvitz Army made for BBC radio & TV, independent radio & Radio Bremen in 1975. With fully restored artwork & new essay.
- Release Date 26th January 2024

ECLEC52854



VAN DER GRAAF GENERATOR
'STILL LIFE'
(REMASTERED VINYL EDITION)

- This new vinyl edition of this classic album has been remastered from the original tapes and was cut at Abbey Road Studios. It fully restores the original LP artwork.
- Release Date 29th March 2024

ECLECLP2866

ANTHONY PHILLIPS & HARRY WILLIAMSON
'GYPSY SUITE'
(REMASTERED & EXPANDED EDITION)

- New remastered and expanded release of the evocative recordings by Genesis founder member Anthony Phillips and Harry Williamson.
- Remastered from the original master tapes. With five bonus tracks. Fully restored artwork and new essay.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

ECLEC2860

ANTHONY PHILLIPS
'SLOW DANCE'
(2 CD JEWEL CASE EDITION)

- 2CD edition of the classic instrumental album by Genesis founder member Anthony Phillips, 'Slow Dance'.
- This 2CD jewel case edition of the album features the remastered original stereo mix, along with a CD of previously unreleased 'Slow Dance' vignettes. It includes a lavishly illustrated booklet that fully restores the original album artwork and features a new essay by Jon Dann in the booklet.
- Release Date 26th January 20 24

ECLEC22590

VAN DR GRAAF
'VITAL
VAN DER GRAAF LIVE'

(REMASTERED 2LP GATEFOLD VINYL EDITION)

- New double gatefold LP edition of the classic live album by Van Der Graaf. Mastered from the original master tapes. Cut at Abbey Road Studios.
- First ever vinyl re-issue of the album with fully restored artwork and new essay with band interviews.
- Release Date 29th March 2024

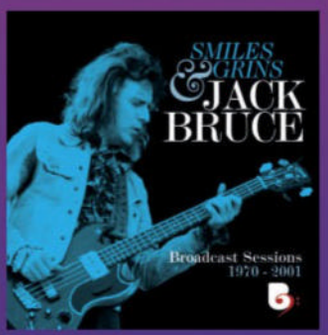
ECLECLP22865

(REMASTERED 2CD EDITION)

- Remastered 2CD edition of the classic live album by Van Der Graaf. Mastered from the original master tapes.
- With fully restored artwork and new essay with band interviews.
- Release Date 29th March 2024

ECLEC22864

JACK BRUCE
'SMILES AND GRINS BROADCAST SESSIONS 1970 - 2001'
(4CD/2BLU-RAY VIDEO REMASTERED BOX SET)



- A new official 4CD & 2 multi-region Blu Ray video boxed set anthology featuring the surviving radio & television broadcast sessions by the legendary Jack Bruce recorded between 1970 & 2001. Featuring an un-broadcast TV session of lifetime for Beat Club in 1970 & all the surviving BBC Radio & TV session recordings & appearances, including two concerts screened by the Old Grey Whistle test in 1975 & 1981.
- All newly remastered & restored from the original master tapes. Includes an illustrated book with essay.
- Release Date 26th January 2024

ECLEC62852

COLOSSEUM
'ELEGY-THE RECORDINGS 1968-1971'
(6CD BOXSET)

- 6CD boxed set celebrating the work of Colosseum recorded between 1968 and 1971. A remastered set including the albums 'Those About To Die Salute You', 'Valentyne Suite', 'The Grass Is Greener', 'Daughter Of Time' and 'Colosseum Live' plus an additional 12 bonus tracks drawn from studio sessions and live recordings. Includes an illustrated book with essay.
- Release Date 23rd February 2024

ECLEC62861

NEKTAR
'RECYCLED'
(5CD REMASTERED AND EXPANDED BOX SET)

- This new 5CD edition features a newly remastered version of the album along with two rare single edits, a discarded early mix of the album by Geoff Emerick and an additional three CDs of live recordings from concerts at Massey Hall, Toronto and Calderone Concert Hall in Long Island on the band's 1976 Recycled tour.
- The set also features an illustrated book and is a fine celebration of a progressive rock classic.
- Release Date 29th March 2024

ECLEC52867

PETER BAUMANN
'PHASE BY PHASE - THE VIRGIN YEARS'
(3CD BOX SET)

- New 3CD clamshell box set featuring all of the albums recorded for Virgin Records between 1976 and 1981 by former Tangerine Dream member Peter Baumann. Featuring the albums 'Romance' 76', 'Trans Harmonic Nights' and 'Repeat Repeat'.
- With an illustrated booklet featuring a new essay.
- Release Date 26th April 2024

ECLEC32871

56 bands

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Ghost Of The Machine
The Mighty Ra
Splink

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Beguiled
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TROY REDFERN
Predatür
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